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Yilmaz, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

Barak lauds Egypt efforts

SPEAKING to reporters after talks with President Hosni Mubarak, Israel's opposition Labour leader Ehud Barak insisted that Israelis "appreciated the role of President Mubarak in pushing the peace process," reports **Nevine Khalil**.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who described the talks as "useful and fruitful," met with Barak Tuesday night and was also present at his meeting with Mubarak yesterday morning.

"The conversations since his arrival yesterday [involved] exchanging views about the crisis, about the future of the peace process and how to salvage that process," said Moussa.

Barak said that "the overall feeling on both sides is that the peace process is so important... that everything possible must be done in order to save it, bearing in mind both the vital and security interests of Israel as well as the interests of all other parties."

Asked what he would do if he were prime minister, Barak responded: "I would order the immediate renewal of cooperation between our security services and the Palestinians. I would allow the Palestinian police to go to the security cordon in Hebron in order to help [bring to an end] street violence. I would do whatever I could in order to resume negotiations about the second deployment that is due in a few months."

Barak was evasive about the issue of settlement building in Jerusalem but, pressed by reporters, said: "We strongly believe in the right of Israel to settle, but not on Arab property. We believe that within the permanent status negotiations we have to have most of the settlers, not necessarily all the settlements, but most of the settlers under our sovereignty. This is part of the permanent [status] negotiations... Both sides must be ready to compromise in order to achieve peace."

New talks

PALESTINIAN International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath and Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai met yesterday at the Tel Aviv home of the Egyptian ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Bassiouni, where they held a similar meeting a week ago.

Palestinian sources told AFP that the two ministers would follow up on the results of a new track in bilateral talks brought about by Egyptian and American mediation efforts.

Shaath told reporters the Palestinian side was willing to give the new mediation effort until the end of July to make some progress.

Albright plan

US SECRETARY of State Madeleine Albright plans to head the US delegation at the Middle East/North Africa economic conference due to be held in Doha, Qatar, in November. Reuter news agency reported that US State Department spokesman, Nicholas Burns, said that Albright has no plans at this stage to visit other countries in the Middle East or to visit the region earlier than this autumn.

The stalemate in negotiations between Israel and the Arabs has put the convening of the conference in jeopardy. Saudi Arabia said it will boycott the meeting held annually since 1994. Other key Arab states, including Egypt and Morocco, have made their attendance conditional on achieving progress in the peace process. Jordan said it would go only if other Arab states attended.

Assembly slams Israel

The UN General Assembly has adopted an unbinding resolution aimed at forcing Israel to stop illegal settlement activities

The UN General Assembly, for the third time, voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to condemn Israel for a Jewish housing project in Jerusalem and urged member states to "discourage" activities which contribute to Israeli settlements.

The resolution, introduced by Arab and Muslim countries, also recommends convening a conference to enforce international rules on protecting civilians in wartime as they pertain to Palestinians in occupied territories.

It also stressed that member states should "fulfil in good faith their obligations" under the UN Charter "to ensure their rights and benefits," which appeared to be a veiled threat to curb Israel's UN membership.

The Assembly, meeting in emergency session, stopped short, however, of ordering economic sanctions against Israel after European Union states warned that the move could trigger negative votes.

The vote on the non-binding resolution was 131-3 with 14 abstentions. Last April, a weaker resolution against the 6,500-unit Har Homa project passed by a vote of 134-3 with 11 abstentions.

The United States, Israel and Micronesia voted against the resolution. Those abstaining were Andorra, Australia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Marshall Islands, Nicaragua, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Slovakia and Uzbekistan.

The abstention of Russia, co-sponsor of the peace process, came as a blow to the Palestinians. Russian deputy permanent representative Alexander Gorelik said his country feared that such a resolution could be the first step towards sanctions.

Although the resolution is non-binding, Arab and Muslim countries considered the action an important step in keeping up international pressure against Israel's decision to build the project in East Jerusalem which the Palestinians want to be their future capital.

"We meet in this resumed session... to prove that no country is above international law," Palestinian delegate Nasser Al-Kidwa said. "The time is approaching when Israel will have to decide whether it is a member of the family of nations or outside that family."

Al-Kidwa said the vote shows that "the world is fed up" with the government of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Speaking before the vote, US ambassador Bill Richardson repeated US opposition to the Har Homa project. But Richardson said the resolution would "undermine rather than build the trust and confidence the negotiating parties need."

Israel's new ambassador, Dore Gold, accused the Palestinians of reneging on their commitments under the peace process and denounced the United Nations for favouritism towards the Arabs.

"Let no member of this assembly delude themselves that this session will in any way advance prospects for peace in our region," Gold said.

"Violence will not make Israel concede," Gold said after the vote. "Neither will false international pressure."

Gold, a former senior adviser to Netanyahu, said the resolution "gives a sense that it's possible to build a bypass route from direct talks in the region by creating this kind of forum with its automatic majorities against Israel."

"But this will achieve nothing," Gold added. "This gives a false sense of international support to the Palestinian Authority and therefore delays the resumption of the negotiations that we're all anxiously awaiting."

The resolution calls on member states to "actively discourage activities which directly contribute to any construction or development of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem."

The first draft recommended a ban on importing goods produced or manufactured in settlements and in Jerusalem. But the sponsors removed it from the final draft in the hope of winning more support. Instead, the resolution demanded that Israel identify the goods produced in those areas.

Richardson said such measures "amount to a demand for a partial economic boycott of Israel" and run contrary to pledges by both parties to the peace process to build economic ties.

In Jerusalem, Israeli bulldozers, ignoring the UN rebuke, resumed work yesterday on the housing project and David Bar-Illan, a top Netanyahu aide, denounced the resolution as "moral bankruptcy."

"It is regrettable that the world organisation finds the building of apartments for young couples condemnable while ignoring the many true dangers to world peace posed by the very dictatorships which sponsored this resolution," Bar-Illan said. "It is an indication of moral bankruptcy and a shameful performance."

Egypt's UN ambassador Nabil El-Arabi told **Hoda Tewfik** in New York the vote "shows that the entire world community is against the building of settlements" in occupied territory.

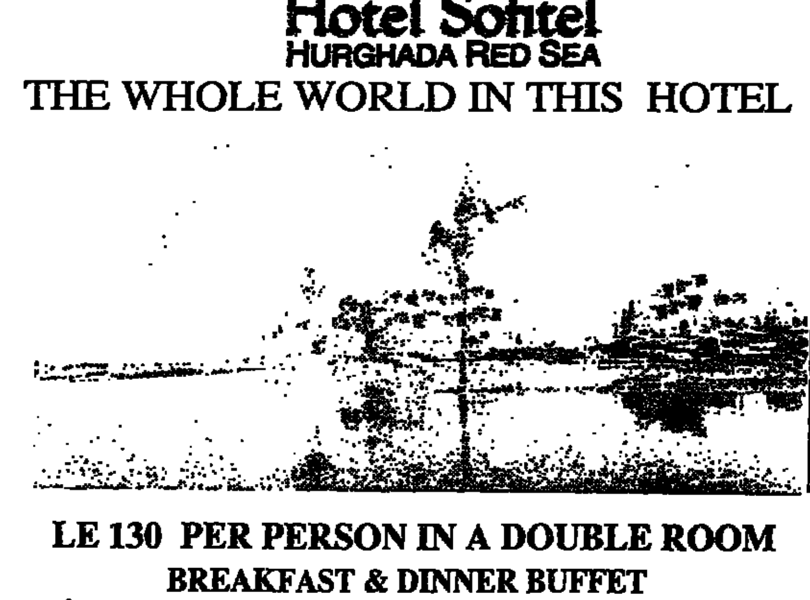
"The clear message that emerged from this second session of the General Assembly is a near unanimous international position that settlements contravene international law and are the principal factor obstructing peace," El-Arabi said. "Peace, therefore, cannot be achieved unless the building of settlements is stopped."

In March, the US used its Security Council veto twice to block resolutions against the project.

Last month, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Har Homa posed a serious threat to the Arab-Israeli peace process and "is seen as the final step towards the isolation of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank." He said the project appeared part of Israel's plan "of fully incorporating East Jerusalem as part of the "unified, eternal capital of the State of Israel."

The General Assembly asked Annan last April to send a fact-finding mission to the region. But the mission was scrapped after Israel imposed what the UN termed "unacceptable conditions."





photos: Sherif Sonbol

ON EL-ALFI Street, car-less Cairenes enjoy their new-found freedom to stroll, window-shop and snatch a breath of air from the jaws of a sultry summer night. The new pedestrian area bustles with *Mouled El-Nabi* revellers torn between traditional sugar dolls and their new plastic counterparts. Downtown dwellers toss and turn as, beneath their windows, festivities fill the sleepless hours. Reclaimed from the exhaust fumes in time for the Prophet's birthday, El-Alfi Street has taken on the colours of a carnival. Commuters may be tempted to abandon their cars and join in the fun...

Divisions wrack militants

A cease-fire appeal issued by imprisoned leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya has triggered divisions within the ranks of Egypt's largest militant group, writes Khaled Dawoud

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, speaking to reporters on Monday, shrugged off a cease-fire appeal issued nearly two weeks ago by the imprisoned leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. The appeal has reportedly caused a rift between the jailed militants, who supported the cease-fire, and expatriate leaders, who rejected it.

El-Alfi noted that expatriate members of Al-Gama'a as well as Jihad "continue to be active, collecting funds to finance followers inside Egypt to carry out acts of violence."

El-Alfi said that the security forces had dealt with the reported cease-fire appeal as "a manoeuvre aimed at influencing the trials taking place in the hope that lighter sentences would be issued against the detainees." He added that the militants, facing strong police pressure, might be seeking to gain time before waging a new wave of attacks.

The appeal to halt terrorist operations "inside and outside Egypt" was made at the opening of the military trial of 98 Al-Gama'a followers, allegedly behind the wave of violence that rocked Egypt in 1994. Mohamed Abdel-Alim, a member of Al-Gama'a sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for attacks against policemen in Suez City, read out what he described as an appeal issued by leaders of the group who are serving life terms for involvement in the assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat.

A few days after the appeal was made expatriate members of Al-Gama'a and Jihad had issued statements rejecting the appeal, suggesting that it had been made under police pressure.

"The regime is trying to shake Al-Gama'a's image and to create the impression that there is a retreat in our declared struggle and that there is a division within Al-Gama'a's ranks. But Al-Gama'a will continue its policy against the regime until it responds to our declared demands," said the statement.

"Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya affirms confidence in its leaders behind bars but does not exclude the possibility that this declaration [appeal] is a government-inspired trick," the statement continued.

The leaders, in whose names the appeal was issued, have tried in the past to reach a conditional cease-fire agreement with the government. One of them, Abboud El-Zomor, the Jihad leader who masterminded Sadat's assassination has been involved in several attempts to strike a deal with the government since violence broke out in 1992. These initiatives foundered because El-Zomor and other militant leaders set conditions — including the strict implementation of Islamic *Shari'a* [law], the release of detained militants and the outlawing of military trials — totally unacceptable to the government.

What is new in the latest appeal — issued in the names of El-Zomor, Karam Zohdi, Nageh Ibrahim, Ali El-Sherif, Hamdi Abdel-Rahman and Fouad El-Dawalibi — is that the offer was unconditional.

"There are many divisions within militant groups these days," said Mahmoud Abdel-Shafi, an Islamist lawyer. "Each group has leaders behind bars and others living in exile and the two are not necessarily in agreement."

Commentators believe the divisions are mainly due to differing evaluations of the achievements of the anti-government campaign. After five years of armed attacks against top officials, policemen, Coptic Christians, foreign tourists and secular intellectuals, the confrontation is now confined to southern Egypt and mainly El-Minya province. Sporadic attacks against policemen and Copts occur in other southern provinces such as Assiut and Beni Suef but, generally, the militants no longer pose the threat they represented a few years ago.

A security source who spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* on condition of anonymity attributed the apparent divisions to different reasons. "The expatriates will never stop terrorism because this is how they make their living," the source said. "Now the question is whether the few terrorists left hiding in the sugar-cane fields will respond to their historic, imprisoned leadership or to those who give them money."

Militants in the sugarcane fields spared little time in providing an answer. Security sources reported yesterday that suspected members of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya killed a police major and wounded four policemen in an ambush in the southern province of Minya late Tuesday in the first attack by Al-Gama'a militants since the cease-fire appeal.

Montasser El-Zayyat, who has defended Islamist leaders in the past and was put on trial himself in the 1980s for alleged involvement in militant activities, appears to be connected with the cease-fire appeal, and affirmed it was an authentic call made by the imprisoned leaders of Al-Gama'a. After statements rejecting the cease-fire were faxed to news organisations, El-Zayyat attempted to play down their importance.

When the military trial of the 98 militants resumed last week, Abdel-Alim told the *Weekly*: "I would like to appeal to brothers outside [in exile] to help us and give us a chance to calm matters and stop the bloodshed." He said all the imprisoned militant leaders, whether Al-Gama'a or Jihad, were behind the appeal.










Serageddin · Dawoud · Rifaat El-Said · Barakat · Farghali · Nour · Ghali · El-Dali · El-Said · Menoufi

Reshuffle debated

A real shift in direction, or just cosmetic change? **Gamal Essam El-Din** and **Shaden Shehab** *explore the significance, or lack thereof, of last week's cabinet reshuffle*

Opposition representatives in the People's Assembly described the changes brought about by last week's cabinet reshuffle as "cosmetic", arguing that the reshuffle had not met expectations for a more basic change in the government line-up. But most of them believed that the changes, announced on 8 July, would give more power to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri. And there was general approval of the appointment of Youssef Boutros Ghali as economy minister.

Yassin Serageddin, leader of the Wafd Party's parliamentary group, said the declared objective of the reshuffle was to speed up economic reform and upgrade public services. "But how can it achieve these targets when the majority of the old guard ministers have remained in their posts, which they have held for over 15 years?" he asked.

One long-standing member of the cabinet who has been dropped is Amal Osman, who held the portfolio of social affairs and insurance for 21 years. Serageddin argued that others should have been replaced, particularly those whose performance is not satisfactory or who are suspected of malpractice.

Serageddin praised the appointment of Cairo University President Moufid Shehab as minister of higher education, but he was less enthusiastic about the other aspect of his portfolio, which deals with scientific research. "I do not understand why Shehab, a professor of international law, has been given the portfolio of scientific research. I think he knows as much about scientific research as I know *about oil exploration,"* he said.

He voiced a similar criticism of the appointment of Mervat El-Tellawi, a former ambassador to Tokyo, who replaced Amal Osman as minister of social affairs and insurance. "How can they make a career diplomat responsible for a ministry that is rife with bureaucracy and problems?" he asked. "I do not think that she is the right person for this portfolio."

Serageddin believes that the most significant result of the reshuffle is that it leaves more power in El-Ganzouri's hands. "Now he is not only prime minister and minister of planning and international cooperation, but is also responsible for local administration, chairman of several joint committees with Arab countries and chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sport," Serageddin said. "This clearly goes against the principles of decentralisation, liberalisation and even democratisation."

Ayman Nour, also from the Wafd Party, applauded the promotion of Youssef Boutros Ghali from minister of state at the Council of Ministers to economy minister. "He is quite efficient, has great experience in economic reform negotiations with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and his appointment is the best thing about this cabinet reshuffle," Nour said. "His strong connections with the business community should not be held against him. In an era of liberalisation, it is the duty of senior officials to have strong connections with business."

Mustafa El-Said, chairman of parliament's Economic Committee, also praised Ghali's appointment. "It will help the committee have a clearer insight into economic policies. However, I hope that Ghali will not act as the representative of the IMF and the promoter of its policies because some of these policies are not in this country's interest."

Serageddin disagreed. While praising Ghali's abilities as an economist, he believes he is the wrong man for the job. "We need an economy minister with greater experience, who is capable of achieving higher growth rates and dealing *with the current difficult problems, such* as unemployment," Serageddin said.

Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Nasserist Democratic Party, was also critical of *Ghali's* appointment. *Ghali's* promotion was, he said, the only concrete change in the reshuffle, but it was "not positive. It means that we will be following the policies of the World Bank and American capitalism."

Nour shared Serageddin's dismay at having to deal with "the same old faces who have held onto their posts for more than 15 years." He did not understand why "some ministers, such as Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid, have had their areas of jurisdiction reduced, while others, such as Ganzouri, have gained more power."

Nour added: "I don't know why the prime minister decided to be directly responsible for local administration. This is a thorny area where corruption is rife. Corruption can't be beaten by making Ganzouri responsible but only by democratising the whole process of decision-making in this country."

He expressed concern that Ganzouri's responsibility for local administration could adversely affect the People's Assembly's supervision of government performance in this vital area because, he said, "Ganzouri rarely comes to the Assembly and rarely responds to questions about corruption. I'm sure the Assembly's Local Administration Committee will face a lot of difficulty in debating reports of the Central Auditing Agency on local administration in the coming period," he added.

Not true, responded the committee's chairman, Abdel-Fattah El-Dali. He said the fact Ganzouri has assumed direct responsibility for local administration means an escalation of the war against corruption and a stronger government commitment to improved local government.

Edward Ghali El-Dahabi, an appointed MP, concurred that Ganzouri's responsibility for local administration would not undercut the Assembly's supervisory powers in this area. "The fact *that Ganzouri rarely comes to the As*sembly does not mean that the Assembly will not be able to exercise supervision. Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, can answer the deputies' questions on Ganzouri's behalf."

El-Badri Farghali of the leftist Tagammu Party said he could not grasp the true significance of "this so-called cabinet reshuffle. All I can say is that Egypt is now in dire need of a new generation of young and energetic ministers capable, through a more self-reliant approach, of translating the hopes of this poor country into reality." He sees the reshuffle as creating "centres of power" around certain ministers, particularly in the fields of agriculture, information, parliamentary affairs and communications.

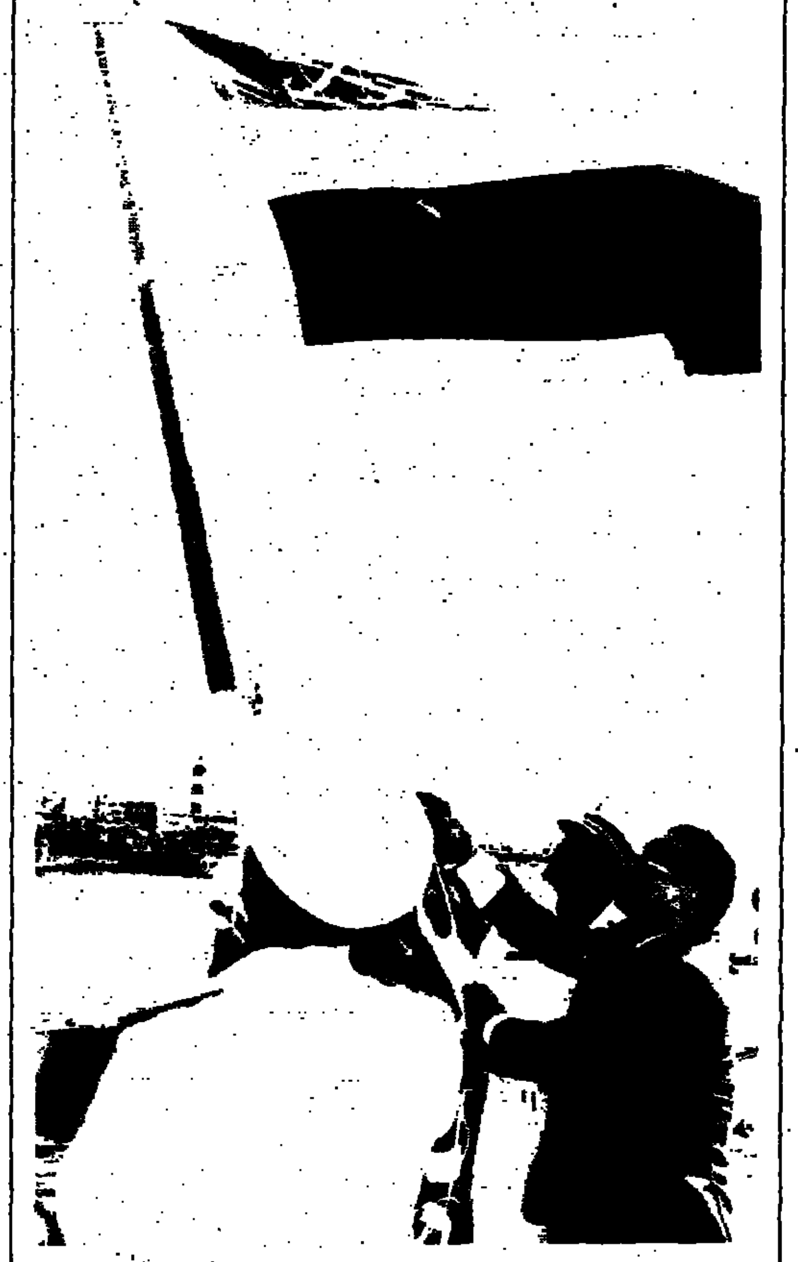
Rifaat El-Said, Tagammu's secretary-general, said the reshuffle did not reflect any particular philosophy and was a disappointment to the man on the street. The fact that Ganzouri has assumed added responsibilities "is neither rational nor logical. The man cannot possibly find the time or energy to take care of all these responsibilities," El-Said said.

Abdel-Hamid Barakat, secretary-general of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, maintained that the reshuffle was "of no significance," because it had merely involved a change in personnel, not policy. "The Labour Party is opposed to the policies of the ruling National Democratic Party, so as long as these policies remain, we can't view any reshuffle as positive."

Kamal El-Menoufi, a professor of political science at Cairo University, argued that the reshuffle "although limited, was significant and necessary." He added that reducing the responsibilities of some ministers was "needed, because someone like Atef Ebeid was in charge of three completely unrelated portfolios." The establishment of a separate portfolio for higher education was also a positive move, "because there are 12 state universities in addition to the new private universities to be looked after."

El-Menoufi approved Ganzouri's as*sumption of the responsibility for local ad*ministration "because he will be in direct contact with the governors." Dropping Amal Osman was also a wise move, he argued, because "new blood is needed."

Sana'a El-Beblawi of the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women said that Mervat El-Tellawi, in her new post as minister of insurance and social affairs, "should focus on social issues and give a push to the NGO movement, so that NGOs can play a role in development. Amal Osman did not do that; this was one of her weak points."



FLAG-RAISING CEREMONY: President Hosni Mubarak raised the Egyptian flag on Sunday atop two US-made Perry class guided-missile frigates, the *ENS Mubarak* and *ENS Taba*, at the Ras El-Tin naval base in Alexandria. The ceremony was attended by a number of ministers and public figures as well as US chargé d'affaires Vincent Battle and Maj. Gen. Freddy McFarren, head of the US Military Cooperation Bureau in Cairo.

The *ENS Mubarak*, formerly *USS Copeland*, was transferred to the Egyptian Navy as a grant while the *ENS Taba*, formerly *USS Gallery*, was sold to the Egyptian government for US$47 million. The Perry class frigates are modern warships armed with Harpoon anti-ship missiles, Standard SM-1 surface-to-air missiles, MI-46 anti-submarine torpedoes and a 76mm rapid-fire gun. Each ship is 450 feet long (140m), manned by 200 officers and crew members and can carry two helicopters.

Two more frigates, the *USS Fahrion* and *USS Lewis B. Puller*, are expected to be transferred to Egypt in 1998. The cost of the four frigates, including associated ammunition, torpedoes, missiles and infrastructure improvements, amounts to $600 million.

Significant governors

MPs say that last week's shake-up of provincial governors was of greater real significance than the cabinet reshuffle a day earlier. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Parliamentarians polled by *Al-Ahram Weekly* believe that last week's shake-up of provincial and city governors, announced 24 hours after the changes in the cabinet, was the more significant of the two reshuffles. Its importance, they agreed, was due not only to the appointment of 10 new governors — compared to four new cabinet ministers — but also because some of the 'old guard' of governors had lost their positions.

In Wafdist MP Ayman Nour's view, the governors' reshuffle was more in tune with events on the ground. "The changes have come following the wide-scale rigging of local council elections several months ago. They are appropriate changes which will bring new blood to some key governorates, especially Cairo and Alexandria," Nour said.

While he believes that Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher was dropped "simply because he is old and suffers from health problems," he thinks that Alexandria Governor Ismail El-Gawsaki was probably replaced because of poor performance.

According to Nour, El-Gawsaki had faced a barrage of criticism in the local press. "And I agree that Alexandria lost some of its beauty and tourist potential at his hands," he added.

Nour was surprised, however, by the appointment of Ahmed Abdel-Ghaffar, chairman of the Textile Manufacturing and Trade Holding Company, as governor of the Nile Delta province of Gharbiya. "Was he appointed simply because most of the textile factories and cotton plantations are located in Gharbiya?" Nour asked. "If so, this is not an adequate reason, because a new governor should have political experience as well as technical expertise."

A parliamentary deputy for Gharbiya, who asked that his name be withheld, said he found the appointment of Maher El-Guindi, the outgoing governor of Gharbiya, as governor of Giza, not only surprising but also incomprehensible. "Guindi was in sharp disagreement with the Gharbiya MPs, especially businessmen," this deputy said. "He made a poor job of handling the riots staged by tenant farmers in villages around Al-Mehalla Al-Kobra in protest against the full implementation of the agricultural landlord-tenant relationship law. We all assumed that he would be dropped, but instead he got a prize. He was made governor of Giza, the governorate with the most tourism in Egypt."

Yassin Serageddin, chief of the Wafd Party's parliamentary group, said the most significant change in the reshuffle was the replacement of Cairo Governor Abdel-Akher. "I criticised Abdel-Akher many times in the People's Assembly because of his aggressive style in addressing Cairo's problems," Serageddin said. "It is true that sometimes his style was effective, as was the case with the eviction of fruit and vegetable merchants from the Rod Al-Farag market. But he would often resort to force in addressing problems, particularly construction offences, although this did not prevent several buildings from collapsing while he was in office. I hope the new governor will be able to solve problems by dialogue with Cairo residents, rather than by resorting to force."

Serageddin also welcomed the replacement of El-Gawsaki which, he argued, was an important step "if Alexandria is to become a beautiful tourist attraction once again." However, he added, "I'm afraid that the new governor, Mohamed Abdel-Salam El-Mahgoub, who previously served as governor of Ismailia, is not the right choice because Alexandria needs a young, dedicated and energetic man."

Mohamed Abdel-Maqsoud, MP for the Red Sea resort of Hurghada, lauded the appointment of Saad Abu-Reeda as governor of the Red Sea Governorate. "The former governor was very bureaucratic," Abdel-Maksoud said. "I hope the new one will be understanding and helpful in solving the problems facing businessmen and their touristic investments."

Raafat Seif, a deputy for the leftist Tagammu Party, was the only dissenter among the MPs polled, insisting that the governors' reshuffle was of little significance. "Although we have adopted liberalisation policies in the political system, the government still insists on keeping all the power in its own hands. So we'll never know why some officials came and others left," he said. "What is clear, however, is that the people do not have any say in the decisions that directly affect their lives."

NileSat prepares for orbit

Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif visited France last week to inspect the construction of the first Egyptian television satellite. **Rehab Saad** *reports on the project*

NileSat, the first Egyptian satellite, will be sent into orbit early next year to transmit 72 television channels, using digital technology, to all parts of the Middle East, from the Gulf to the Atlantic. The move will not only mark Egypt's entry into a new age of space technology, but should also prove financially lucrative.

"It is an economic project which will bring in good revenue and, at the same time, affirm Egypt's position as a media pioneer in the region," said Hamdi Abdel-Halim, head of transmission projects at the Radio and Television Union.

In addition to the 72 channels beamed to the Middle East, NileSat will also transmit 11 Egyptian local channels to remote parts of the country and the Arab world. "Moreover, there will be eight specialised channels, including one for news and others for sports, children, education, drama and entertainment," Abdel-Halim said. "Some of them will be encrypted and can only be received by subscribers who pay a fee. Other channels will be rented to other countries."

Abdel-Halim said the idea of putting an Egyptian television satellite in orbit was first considered in 1979. Extensive studies were made but the idea was eventually turned down because of the exorbitant cost, he said.

The idea was re-floated in 1985 after technological advances cut costs, making the project economically feasible. Additional studies were made in the early 1990s which showed that the project could be financially rewarding. Revenue from the project will at first be used to reimburse state coffers for about $200 million of government money spent to finance it. He noted that revenues will cover this amount in four years.

After President Hosni Mubarak approved the plan in 1995, a tender was announced and a contract was signed with the French Matra Marconi company the same year.

"Now the 1.7 ton satellite has been manufactured and is undergoing tests to ascertain that it will perform its tasks efficiently once it is in orbit, 36,000 kilometres above the equator," Abdel-Halim said. The rocket that will put the satellite in orbit will be launched from French Guyana, he added.

The satellite will have two ground tracking stations, one in the 6th of October City and the other at the Mediterranean town of Al-Hammam near Marsa Matrouh.

Abdel-Halim said that a second spare satellite, NileSat 2, is under construction at present and will be used if NileSat 1 encounters problems.

There will be no competition between NileSat and ArabSat, "but the two will complement each other," Abdel-Halim added.

New census reveals family planning success story

A decline in the national birth rate, revealed by the latest census, is being hailed as proof of the success of the family planning programme. **Gihan Shahine** reports

Ihab Elwi

Census figures released last week show that the national birth rate has declined *from 2.8 per cent in 1986 to 2.1 per cent* last year. The number of women using contraception has also more than doubled over the last 15 years. In 1980 only 24 per cent of women of child-bearing age used contraception compared to 49 per cent in 1995.

"These figures show that the national family planning programme is making headway," Ihab Elwi, chairman of the Central Agency for Mobilisation and Statistics, told a conference organised by the Egyptian Demographic Association. He said that Egypt's total population was expected to hit 65 million last year, but it actually stabilised at 61 million.

The most productive age group, those aged between 15 and 60, now accounts for *59.9 per cent of the population*, compared to 53.8 per cent in 1986, Elwi said. The average Egyptian family currently has 4.6 members, compared to 4.9 members in *1986.*

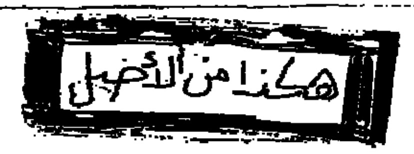
The national family planning programme focused on ensuring the ready availability of contraception; providing urban and rural areas with family planning services and centres; and launching an intensive media campaign to increase public awareness. The programme also concentrated on improving reproductive health pre-natal care, said Dr Moushira El-Shafei, deputy health minister for family planning.

Another reason for the decline in the population growth rate is the fact that more people are getting married late in *life, Elwi said. Married couples (within* the legal age of marriage) made up 64.8 per cent of people in 1986 but this figure dropped to 61.2 per cent last year. The number of unmarried people increased from 25.7 per cent to 27.8 per cent. The number of divorced and widowed people has dropped by 1.4 per cent over the last 10 years. Marriages below the legal age, which were common in rural areas, have also dropped as a result of the success of the illiteracy-eradication programme, Elwi said.

According to the census results, emigration from the countryside to the big cities is also on the decline. The demographic map has remained relatively unchanged for some time, with 43 per cent of the popula*tion living in urban* areas and 57 per cent in the countryside.

In addition, the census revealed that the illiteracy rate among Egyptians has declined from 49.6 per cent in 1986 to 38.6 per cent last year. The number of those holding a pre-university education degree stands at 32.8 per cent of the population, compared to 27.4 per cent 10 years ago. Egyptians with university degrees represent 7.3 per cent of the population, compared to 4.3 *per* cent in 1986.

The workforce rose last year to 35.4 per cent of the population from 34.4 per cent in 1986.



Seeking dialogue

More than 180 officials and men of religion assembled in Cairo this week to promote a dialogue between Islam and the West. Amira Howeidy attended


photo: Nour Sobeih
Men of religion address the issue of a new relationship between Islamic and Western cultures

The Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, an affiliate of the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments), began its annual conference on Sunday. Its subject this year was "Islam and the West: the past, present and future." More than 180 officials and men of religion, both Muslim and Christian, gathered at a luxury Nile-side hotel to address the issue of a new relationship between Islamic and Western cultures.

According to Minister of *Al-Awqaf* Hamdi Zaqzouq, participants were to discuss 56 papers on the historical ties between Islam and the West, Islam's position on non-Muslims living in Muslim countries, and the West's position on Muslims and dialogue between the two sides.

The conference began with speeches by President Hosni Mubarak — delivered on his behalf by Zaqzouq, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, and Pope Shenoudah III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In his speech, Mubarak said that "modest" efforts were being made to "establish the desired cooperation between Islam and the West." What was required from the West now, he said, was a correct understanding of Islamic tenets and the "brotherhood of religions."

But as the discussions developed, many Muslim speakers focused on what they called Western attempts "to tarnish the image of Islam," objecting, in particular, to the insults directed recently by Jewish settlers at the Prophet Mohamed and other Islamic symbols.

Tantawi condemned "Jewish extremist groups," and urged Muslims to defend their religion, underlining the necessity of "fighting" extremist elements. He told the conference: "We welcome cooperation and dialogue [with the West] on condition that it offers us peace, but if it offers us hostility, our creed entitles us to defend our religion and our holy symbols."

Abdel-Sabour Marzouk, deputy chairman of the Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, lamented the double standards used by the West when dealing with Muslims. "It is sad that Muslims are described as terrorists... while Israel is left free to build settlements in Jerusalem and to kill innocent people in Qana [Lebanon] without anyone objecting," he commented.

Nasr Farid Wassel, the Mufti of the Republic, sees no clash of civilisations between Islam and the West. "Rather there are misunderstandings and a distortion of Islam's image in the West and vice versa," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. This distortion, Wassel explained, is promoted internationally by "forces that want to damage the relationship between ourselves and others. We believe that international Zionism is behind all this."

Meraj Khalid, a rector at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, said that Islamic revivalist movements are viewed as "anti-democratic forces while the Islamic approach towards family and women is branded discriminatory, unjust and authoritarian." The West would have to remove all such pre-judgements, he said, before a meaningful dialogue could take place.

As the discussions dragged on, the conference became increasing confused and disordered. Print-outs of the speakers' papers were not available, and, since some of those who were invited had not shown up, the conference programme underwent some drastic last-minute changes.

For Ahmed Sedki Al-Dajani, a Palestinian expert on Islamic affairs, "the effort behind the conference and the status of many of the participants are very impressive." However, he added, "I feel hesitant about how fruitful the discussions will be amidst all this confusion."

Dozens of television cameramen crowded the conference room on the first day, their cables tangling with the flowing robes of Muslim preachers and Vatican representatives. However, the crowd dwindled to around 40 on the second and third days of the conference.

Another complaint was voiced by professor Niels Barfoed, head of Denmark's Writers Union. He told the *Weekly*: "Seeing only five headphones carrying translation from the Arabic on the heads of some foreigners discouraged me from speaking, because I could see that the majority of the participants were Arabs, with no headphones, who might not understand what I had to say."

Saudi paper prosecuted for slander

Six journalists — three Saudi Arabians and three Egyptians — are facing slander and libel charges in connection with a complaint filed by President Mubarak's two sons. Nevine Khalil reports

Prosecutor-General Raga'a El-Arabi has decided to press slander and libel charges against six journalists — three Saudi Arabians and three Egyptians — for publishing an article accusing President Hosni Mubarak's two sons, Gamal and Alaa, of power peddling. The Saudi journalists are Hesham and Mohamed Ali Hafez, publishers of the London-based *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* newspaper, and Othman Al-Amir, its chief editor. The Egyptians are Fawzia Salama, managing editor of *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*'s sister publication, *Al-Jadida* magazine, its layout editor, Gamal Ismail, and reporter Sayed Abdel-Aati, who contributed the article. The six were summoned to appear before the Abdin Court of Misdemeanours. But apart from Abdel-Aati, who works for the opposition *Al-Wafd* newspaper, the others are believed to be outside Egypt.

The drama unfolded on 27 May when *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* ran a one-page advertisement to promote the first issue of *Al-Jadida*. The sensationlist headlines promised that the next day *Al-Jadida* will expose "with photos, facts and figures" Alaa and Gamal Mubarak's power peddling as well as the commissions they were paid in multi-million dollar deals. The advertisement claimed that: the two sons are paid a commission of LE1 million for every Airbus aeroplane acquired by the national carrier EgyptAir; the introduction of mobile telephones was delayed because Ala'a Mubarak wanted to be the sole agent; the Cairo governorate is furbishing the capital's streets with expensive granite tiles produced by a factory owned by Ala'a, who is also the sole importer of sugar and apples.

The two sons immediately filed a complaint with the attorney-general, branding the contents of the advertisement as "baseless lies and fabrications." In a subsequent testimony, they said they have no ties with EgyptAir, its purchases or the Airbus Company. They denied any connections with the Ministry of Communications or the companies which submitted tenders for mobile telephones. They also said they do not own a granite tile factory and are not in the business of importing sugar and apples. The two sons said that the aim of the article was to "slander them and their family and falsely imply that they abuse their influence as the sons of the president for personal gains."

Al-Sharq Al-Awsat published a retraction of the contents of the advertisement on the following day and announced that the issue of *Al-Jadida*, which contains the article, was withdrawn from the market. It also said that following an internal investigation, the three Egyptians involved, namely the magazine's managing editor, layout editor and the reporter who contributed the article, were fired.

On 10 June, the two sons filed another complaint with the attorney-general after the *Al-Jadida* issue that contains the article was found on the market. And although the Saudi chief-editor Othman Al-Amir repeated the retraction in a BBC interview on 30 May and took the responsibility upon himself, the two Mubarak sons argued that the presence of *Al-Jadida* on the market "proves the management's malicious intention."

Reporter Sayed Abdel-Aati, who was summoned for questioning, at first denied any connection with the article. But after he was shown a hand-written fax copy of the article which he had sent to Fawzia Salama, admitted that he made a contribution to the story. He added, however, that he "specifically asked Salama to remove his name from the story if any changes were made in his original copy." He said that several changes were made, including the addition of unfounded rumours about the activities of the two sons. Abdel-Aati also accused the publishers, the chief-editor, managing editor and layout editor of falsely implicating him in the case.

Ramses II goes home

A governmental committee has decided to move the pollution-plagued colossus of Ramses II to more healthy surroundings in the location where it was found

A decision has been taken at last to move the colossus of Ramses II, which stands now an easy prey to pollution on Ramses Square, to more salubrious surroundings.

A committee of experts has decided to move the 70-ton granite statue to Meit Rahina, south of Giza, where the statue was originally found.

"There were several sites to choose from, but a consensus has been reached that the statue should go back to where it belongs," Culture Minister Farouk Hosni told a news conference on Tuesday. "The statue has suffered enough from major pollution problems and it is about time that it should go back to Meit Rahina."

The statue was brought to Cairo from there and put on a pedestal opposite the main railway station in the early 1950s.

Relocating the statue is part of a larger scheme to revamp the Meit Rahina archaeological site, Hosni said.

The statue will be the main attraction in an open-air museum nearing completion in Meit Rahina, where a string of new finds focused attention on a provincial town which few tourists bothered to visit. Antiquities officials are determined to turn the site into a "must" for tourists. "This is a good opportunity to revamp a site that has been long neglected," Hosni said.

The relocation process will take three months to complete, with the help of the armed forces, at a cost of LE23 million.

Before the statue embarks on the journey back home, a number of measures will be taken, including the restoration of its damaged parts. "The statue suffers from many cracks, therefore an iron dress will be tailored to fortify it during the transfer process," Ali Hassan, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, explained.

The route which the 11-metre high statue will take is currently under study. A possible route is one passing through the Munib district in Giza.

Ramses II, one of Egypt's longest reigning monarchs, is remembered as a prolific builder, victor in the famous battle of Kadesh in Syria, and father of scores of princes and princesses.

Peace Now on Cairo visit

A delegation of Israel's Peace Now Movement was in Cairo this week as part of an effort to rally peace forces in the region to achieve a just resolution of the Palestinian problem. Nevine Khalil reports

The Israeli Peace Now movement sent a delegation to Cairo this week for talks with the Egyptian members of the International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace (IAAIP). During the five-day visit, the delegation, made up of four Israeli academics headed by Yehudit Herel, as well as reserve General Mordechai Bar On, met with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa on Monday. Informed sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the delegation also wanted to set up a meeting with President Hosni Mubarak, but this was deemed premature in the present circumstances. Mubarak met with a Peace Now delegation in Cairo last December.

The Peace Now visit was the third routine meeting with the Egyptian group of the IAAIP, a spin-off from last January's Copenhagen Declaration which brought together Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian, Palestinian and European intellectuals, opinion-makers and former officials. The alliance is also reaching out to the United States in order to give the IAAIP momentum in the country which has the most powerful Jewish lobby in the world.

"We need solidarity between the peace forces in Israel and those abroad in favour of a resumption of the negotiations and an end to the current peace process crisis," said Bar On after meeting with Moussa on the last day of the visit. The foreign minister explained to the Israelis his views on the obstacles hampering peace, and was briefed on Peace Now's role in promoting the peace process inside Israel. The movement seeks to "mobilise Israeli public opinion to bring about elections for a new government that would work for peace," Bar On told reporters, because chances of a breakthrough with Binyamin Netanyahu's government were dim.

"The delegation clearly indicated their awareness of the necessity for a just and balanced peace," Moussa said. The movement believes that the Palestinians should have their own state, with Jerusalem as its capital. Also, that the Golan Heights should be returned to Syria, "which would not settle for less than what Egypt accepted" in return for peace with Israel, Bar On added.

"In our country, we are attacked by those who say we have no Arab partners for peace. We are here to prove the contrary," Herel said in Cairo.

The IAAIP is currently planning the first conference of its kind, bringing together all peace forces in the region to meet in Jerusalem by the end of this year or early next year in order to form a united front for peace. The thrust of the conference's agenda would focus on "two states and two peoples" for the Palestinians and Israelis, the return of the Golan Heights to Syria, withdrawal from occupied southern Lebanon and ensuring Israeli security needs.

The first meeting between IAAIP members took place last March in Jerusalem after a demonstration against the building of a Jewish quarter in Jebel Abu Ghneim, the second in Tel Aviv in June, and finally this month's meeting in Cairo. During such visits, arrangements are made for the visiting group to meet with various forces in society. As examples, the Egyptians met with the Jerusalem Women's Movement composed of Palestinian and Israeli women united for peace, and in June with a large number of reserve Israeli officers — a meeting arranged by Tel Aviv's former mayor and army general Shlomo Lahat.

According to Lutfi El-Kholi, a member of the IAAIP and prominent Egyptian intellectual, Israel is no longer a united country, because "there are three clear-cut divisions within it". The first, El-Kholi said, is the Likud government and its coalition with the "fanatics and extremists", which add up to around 35 per cent of the population; at the other end is an equal 35 per cent from the left and "a few in the centre" which have formed over 28 peace movements calling for a Palestinian state; and finally 30 per cent who are "undecided and sway between this side and that according to unfolding events".

El-Kholi emphasised that it was this last group "that needs to be won over in order for the peace forces to prevail", adding that this must be done soon because the Arab-Israeli conflict has begun to head into a "dangerous religious direction". "The conflict is losing its political dimension, and turning into a religious struggle," he said, referring to recent acts of religious desecration against Muslim and Christian symbols by Israelis. "This could unleash a new hell in the region," El-Kholi warned.

Tough sentence in corruption case

THE SUPREME State Security Court sentenced Abdel-Wahhab El-Habbak, former chairman of the Holding Company for Engineering Industries, on Monday to 10 years imprisonment after finding him guilty of misusing his position to make illegal profit.

The court, following a four-month trial, also ordered El-Habbak to return to the state treasury $24 million plus LE5 million and pay a fine equal to these amounts.

El-Habbak, whose case made headlines in the Arabic-language press, was convicted of making LE91 million in illegal profits during his long career with the public firm and in other positions. He retired last year.

His wife, son and daughter, who were present when the court handed down the sentence, said they would appeal, describing the case against El-Habbak as a "conspiracy."

El-Habbak himself insisted that he accumulated his wealth legally, although he could not produce documents to prove this to the court.

The case against El-Habbak, a former member of the People's Assembly, began nearly a year ago when the Administrative Control Authority received information that he had misused his position to make illegal profit and accumulate wealth. The investigation showed that he owned several condominium apartments, seaside villas, luxury cars and several accounts in Egyptian and foreign banks. He also bestowed large amounts of money on his wife, divorcée, son and daughter.

Documents were seized from his house showing that he had deposited large sums in banks outside Egypt. At this point, El-Habbak offered to withdraw $20 million from foreign banks and return it to the state treasury. By doing so, he provided prosecutors with irrefutable evidence that he had amassed a fabulous wealth illegally.

Defending himself, El-Habbak said he was paid large amounts of money during his long career, by the People's Assembly, the ministries of industry and the public business sector, the Philips Company and the Holding Company for Engineering Industries. Prosecutors, however, proved that the total amounts paid by all these bodies to El-Habbak did not exceed LE718,000. He was accused, and indicted, of making LE91 million in illicit profits.

The government now will seek to regain $30 million which, it is believed, El-Habbak deposited in banks outside Egypt. The action will be based on an international agreement for combating money-laundering, of which Egypt is a signatory.

In the earlier investigation, El-Habbak's wife admitted to interrogators that he had bestowed $630,000 and LE440,000 on her. His divorcée said he paid her LE300,000 upon their divorce.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Madani's release renews hope for Algeria

The surprising release of FIS leader Abbassi Madani signals genuine possibilities of national reconciliation in Algeria, **Amira Howeidy** reports



Abbasi Madani, leader of the outlawed FIS speaks with residents of the Balcourt neighbourhood, on his way to the Kabul Mosque in Algiers. Madani was released Tuesday (photo: AFP)

In an unexpected move, the Algerian government has freed Abbassi Madani, leader of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Madani was released on Tuesday, after spending six years in jail together with his hard-line deputy Ali Belhaj. The military prosecutor's office in Blida, where Madani, 66, had been sentenced to 12 years imprisonment in 1992, said that Abbas was released "on parole."

The move came one week after Algerian authorities released the group's third man, Abdel-Qader Hachani. Algerian sources predict that Belhaj will soon be released, but there has been no official announcement to this effect.

Many observers see Madani's release as a goodwill gesture by Algerian President Liamine Zeroual's government, but some still question the motives behind the move.

Ibrahim Youssri, Egypt's former ambassador to Algeria, told the *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the move represents "either a real desire for reconciliation with the FIS or a political manoeuvre from both the regime and the FIS which will produce nothing." He added, however, that the release of Madani *is* a cause for optimism.

Madani, compared to his firebrand deputy, was widely seen as the moderate face of the FIS. A former university lecturer in educational psychology, Madani headed the *FIS during its 30-*month *of ascendance under the* democratic reforms introduced by former President Chadli Benjedid in 1990.

Since Madani's arrest, various influential politicians and public figures called repeatedly for his release, together with his deputy, in the hope that their influence could halt, or at least contain, the violence in the country. But the government had consistently rejected such appeals.

A public referendum held last year to change the constitution and last month's parliamentary elections had been interpreted as attempts by the government to achieve its slogan of "peace without the FIS."

Madani's release follows a renewed wave of violence in which more than 100 people were killed or injured. On Monday, a bomb in the Algiers suburb of Baraki killed 26 people and wounded many others. Over the weekend, 44 Algerians were killed, most with their throats cut, in a poor *rural area near the capital. The attack was blamed on* the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Also near the capital, a similar massacre on Monday claimed the lives of 15 civilians, slaughtered in a similar fashion.

"It seems that the Algerian regime has finally come to realise that it has failed to dissolve the widely popular group [FIS] or to control the mad state of violence," Youssri noted.

Last week the FIS's third man, Hachani, walked free from jail, having received a five-year sentence, covered by his period in detention since 1992. The court deprived Hachani of his civil and political rights for three years.

Hachani's release was welcomed by the FIS spokesman in exile and most Algerian opposition parties, but decried by secular groups firmly opposed to Islamic political activism.

At least 60,000 Algerians have been killed since the *violence broke out five years ago, when the Algerian* army canceled the results of the first round of elections held in late 1991 to block a FIS victory.

While many observers welcomed Madani's release with relief, others questioned the charismatic FIS leader's ability to control all militant groups and put an end to further violence. The FIS, skeptics recall, has nothing to do with the GIA. The later, blamed for most of the recent violence, criticise the FIS for being too moderate in its attitude toward the government.

Can Kuwait forgive and forget?

Kuwait's government is carefully normalising its ties with Jordan, Yemen and Sudan, countries that are now seeking forgiveness for their support of Iraq's 1990 invasion of the oil-rich Gulf state. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

The front pages of most Arab daily newspapers last Thursday carried the picture of a Kuwaiti national airline carrier taking off from Amman's International Airport for the first time in seven years. Meanwhile, an Iraqi plane stood on the airport's tarmac immobile since Iraq's troops took over Kuwait in August 1990.

Also a week ago, a semi-official Kuwaiti delegation met Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. And the same day, Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah received Sudanese State Minister of Foreign Affairs Mustafa Osman Ismail who handed him a letter from Sudanese President Omar El-Bashir.

These three events on the same day represented the first contact in seven years between Kuwait and the three countries. Yet, while the Kuwaiti government seems willing *to cautiously improve ties with the Arab* countries that sided with Baghdad in 1990, the majority of Kuwaitis remain opposed to such moves.

Following the limited but significant steps made to improve ties between Kuwait, Jordan, Yemen and Sudan, a group of prominent Kuwaiti parliament members called upon the government on Monday to slow down the pace of normalisation with the three Arab states. According to MP Hassan Jawhar, 10 deputies submitted a non-binding "recommendation that the government *should not go very fast in normalising* relations between Kuwait and the governments which sided with Iraq during the invasion."

Such public pressure has a strong influence on the Kuwaiti government. Differences among Kuwaitis concerning their country's policy towards the countries that supported Iraq has reportedly reached the point of creating a division within the country's ruling Sabah family.

Kuwaiti Crown Prince and Prime Minister Saad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has been out of the country for over six months for "medical treatment," according to official sources. The Crown Prince said recently that he will be back in Kuwait by the beginning of next month. During his absence, the country has been run by foreign minister and acting Prime Minister Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The Kuwaiti Crown Prince is known for his opposition to the normalisation of ties with the Arab countries that supported the Iraqi invasion, mainly the Palestinians, Jordan, Yemen and Sudan. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister *Sabah seems, however, amenable to the idea* and has been lobbying Kuwaiti public opinion to support his drive for improving ties with these countries.

A Kuwaiti airliner taking off from Amman's International airport while an Iraqi plane stood unmoved on the ground for nearly seven years *(photo: Reuters)*

Sabah has repeatedly asked Kuwaitis to stop using the term *"Dewal Al-Ded"*, or opposing countries, while referring to pro-Iraq Arab *states, and advised Kuwaitis to think of their* long-term interests as an integral part of the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The conflicting views have led senior Kuwaiti officials to state clearly that their moves towards improving ties with these Arab countries would be slow and that the case of each country will be considered separately.

Among the three countries with which Kuwait agreed to establish contact last week, Jordan is the most likely candidate for the restoration of diplomatic ties severed seven years ago. Yemen might come next, followed by Sudan which most observers believe has the slimmest chance of improving its ties with the ruling Sabah family.

Over the past two years, Jordan's King Hussein, an internationally recognised politician and an expert at changing alliances to assure the stability of his country, took several steps to distance himself from Iraqi President *Saddam Hussein.* King Hussein did not only agree to host members of the Iraqi opposition, including Saddam's closest family members, but has also spoken openly against the Baathist government in Baghdad and held it responsible for the suffering of the Iraqi people.

The United States *has reportedly en*couraged Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to improve their ties with Jordan as a reward to King Hussein and to help him in distancing Amman further from the Iraqi government. After the exchange of visits last week, Kuwait's Acting Prime Minister Sabah *invited former Jordanian Prime Minister Ab*del-Karim Al-Kabariti to visit Kuwait. Kabariti has been credited as the man who exerted the strongest efforts to restore ties between Jordan, Kuwait and other Gulf countries. The recently appointed Jordanian Premier Abdel-Salam Al-Majali said he will soon issue an invitation to Foreign Minister Sabah to visit Amman and meet King Hussein.

Yemen is part of the Arabian Peninsula and has strong historic links with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Riyadh has already led the move towards improving ties with Yemen over the past two years, easing the Kuwaiti government's endeavour to establish contacts with Sanaa. The semi-official Kuwaiti delegation, including former ministers and prominent intellectuals, that visited Yemen and met with President Saleh, was well received by their Yemeni counterparts.

As for Sudan, the government of Sudanese *President Omar Al-Bashir appears isolated* and opposed by most Arab governments because of its alleged support of Muslim militant groups. Thus, it may be a long time before diplomatic ties are restored between Kuwait and Khartoum. The Sudanese government's support of the Iraqis during the Gulf crisis was staunch. Khartoum's leaders at the time competed in issuing statements in support of Saddam Hussein and announced that the Sudanese government was training *mujahidin* to fight against the US-led alliance seeking to liberate Kuwait.

Kuwait maintains a chargé d'affaires in all three countries, but the embassies of Jordan, Yemen and Sudan in Kuwait have been closed since 1990.

Despite all the moves made to improve ties between Kuwait and pro-Iraq Arab countries, the Palestinians and PLO leader Yasser Arafat who described Saddam Hussein in 1990 as a "mountain that can never be shaken by the wind," are certainly excluded. Nearly 250,000 Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait after the US-led alliance liberated the Gulf state from Iraq's occupation in March 1991. Thousands were mistreated, and many killed and tortured for allegedly supporting the Iraqi occupying forces.

Palestinian officials, including Arafat, *have joined Jordanian, Yemeni and Su*danese officials over the past two years in making public pledges that they supported Kuwait's sovereignty and that they were originally opposed to the Iraqi move in 1990.

Saudi Arabia, which also turned against Arafat after Kuwait's occupation, has recently taken a few conciliatory gestures towards the PLO leader. Kuwait, however, seems firm in its opposition to the restoration of links with the Palestinian leadership as a punishment for its support of Saddam. *According to several Arab analysts, it is the* Palestinians who are suffering the most from the suspension of the generous aid several Gulf countries provided them before the war.

Yilmaz in a hornets' nest

Having survived a vote of confidence in parliament, Turkey's new prime minister, Mesut Yilmaz, faces a *'mission impossible'*. ***Omayma Abdel-Latif*** *reports*

After comfortably surviving a vote of confidence in parliament on Saturday, Turkey's new prime minister and leader of the conservative Motherland Party (ANAP) is now firmly set to run the country, supported by the influential army establishment and Turkish President Suleiman Demirel.

Some Turkish political experts, however, say that Yilmaz, who served twice before as prime minister, for short periods in 1990 and 1993, faces an uphill battle to seal his grip on power. They predict a short life span for his government. Neither of his two previous governments lasted for more than three months. Sceptics and opponents wonder whether the chances of the staunch secular leader are better this time.

In a stormy parliament session, which was interrupted several times when deputies from the former ruling Islamic Refah Party got involved in physical fights with their secular opponents, Yilmaz easily won a vote of confidence by 280 votes to 256 in 550-seat house. Two deputies abstained while the remainder did not turn up to vote. In one incident in parliament, a Refah member threatened to use his gun against a secular deputy who lifted a banner with words insulting the Refah leader and former Prime Minister Necemettin Erbakan.



An Islamist MP trying to attack his secular colleague during the vote of confidence in Yilmaz's government *(photo: Reuter)*

Yilmaz was appointed two weeks ago to replace Erbakan, the country's first Islamic premier, who was forced out of office in June by the military because of his Islamic-oriented policies. Erbakan and his former coalition partner Tansu Ciller, head of the True Path Party, criticised Yilmaz's appointment by Demirel, saying the move was undemocratic.

"The first step we will take is to return everything to normal. Our nation is sick of disputes," Yilmaz told reporters after the vote. One of the first signs of the "return to normality" was a visit by Yilmaz to the graveyard of the creator of modern Turkey, Kamal Ataturk, shortly after winning the vote in parliament.

But, according to observers, Yilmaz's mission might not be easy. "Yilmaz faces a great challenge because he has to carry out the mandate presented to him by the military to counter fundamentalist activities. They (the army) expect him to do it now," Ilnur Cevik, editor-in-chief of the *Turkish Daily News* told *Al-Ahram Weekly.*

In the light of a memo presented by army commanders to former premier Erbakan, Yilmaz is under pressure from the army to order the closure of Imam Hatip (religious schools) and extend compulsory education from five to eight years, thereby eliminating religious education at primary and sec*ondary school levels.*

"The secularist establishment wants quick results against Islamists irrespective of whether they are fundamentalists, moderates or even simple people who go to mosques," said Dogu Ergil, a Turkish political commentator.

However, Yilmaz has to achieve this discreetly without alienating the religious masses in Turkey which do not support the Refah and voted for ANAP in the latest parliament elections.

Yilmaz faces even more challenges. He will have to introduce new legislation on political parties and elections as well as a number of other political reforms required by the constitution before early parliamentary elections due to be held sometime next year.

"This is another sticky area for him because he has to satisfy the requirements of his coalition partners and all the other parties and independent deputies who have different interests," said Guney Ozturk, a foreign editor at the daily d newspaper *Sabbah.*

One political observer of Turkish affairs described Yilmaz's coalition of left-wing and secular parties as "rather fragile." Beside the parties which were given ministerial portfolios in Yilmaz's cabinet, the new premier also depends on the the Republican People's Party (CHP), which said that it will support the new coalition in parliament from outside, without becoming part of the government. CHP holds 49 seats in parliament.

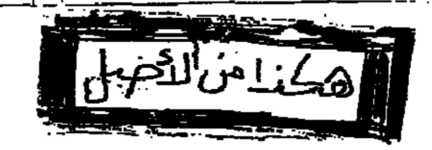
Kemal Balci of the *Turkish Daily News* wrote that the most difficult obstacle facing the present coalition led by Yilmaz is how to survive its internal imbalances and not give way to pressure from outside forces.

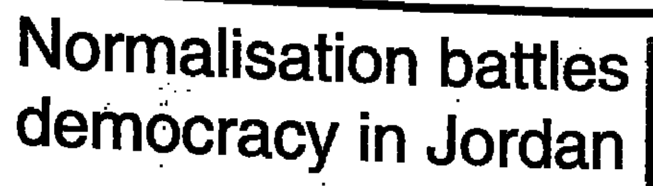
Apart from the internal rifts and the deep division between secularists and Islamists, Turkey's foreign policy was among the top issues on the new government's agenda. Yilmaz vowed to give priority to Turkey's relations with the United States and Europe.

On the other hand, a new policy with more regional consideration is what Bulent Ecevit, Yilmaz's deputy, plans to follow. Ecevit is in favour of forging closer links with Baghdad and is said to be a personal friend of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Such *tendencies might* worsen Turkey's relations with the United States and other Arab countries, critics warned.

As the new coalition highlights the differences among the member-parties on the domestic and foreign policy issues, ANAP sources believe that Yilmaz should focus on using this government as an interim one to lead the country to elections.

"Yilmaz should shoulder the simple task of introducing laws that will make the coming elections fair and should then announce an election date so as not to be overwhelmed by the swamp he has entered," said one Turkish observer.





Normalisation battles democracy in Jordan

Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood will boycott the upcoming parliament elections in protest over the government's clampdown on civil liberties. Lola Keilani reports from Amman

In one of its strongest attacks against the government since the introduction of the multi-party system in Jordan in 1992, the Muslim Brotherhood accused the cabinet of Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel-Salam Al-Majali of "targeting democratic freedoms, putting civil society institutions under siege and aiming at marginalising popular participation in decision making."

On Sunday, one day after announcing its decision to boycott the November parliament elections, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement saying that the Jordanian government is seeking "to totally restructure the state and society in a way which will prevent the achievement of justice, stability or freedom."

The Brotherhood's decision to boycott elections has come at a time when relations between the Jordanian government and the opposition groups have reached their lowest point in years. The opposition, mainly the Brotherhood and smaller nationalist and leftist groups, disagree with the government on its policy of normalising relations with Israel and disapprove a series of royal decrees issued by King Hussein restricting freedom of the press and other political rights. Prime Minister Al-Majali turned down repeated demands by the opposition to hold an emergency parliament session to debate the royal decrees.

The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, announced that it will abide by the boycott decision despite initial reports that dissent existed within the Brotherhood's ranks over the move.

The IAF forms the largest opposition bloc in Jordan with 16 deputies holding seats in the 80-member parliament. Although its leaders say they are financially and administratively independent of the parent group, the 16 deputies in parliament are all prominent Brotherhood members and are not expected to violate the decision to boycott the elections.

A senior IAF member told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Front cannot afford to violate the Brotherhood leadership's decision. "If the Muslim Brotherhood feel that the Front will not abide by their decision, they will force their own members within the IAF to boycott the elections," said an IAF executive council member who did not wish to be identified.

In a news conference last week, the Muslim Brotherhood's general superviser, Abdul-Majid Znibate, listed the reasons that prompted his group to reach its decision on the elections. He said the press and publication law recently approved by the government and the introduction of the one-person one-vote system — which the opposition parties see as an attempt to decrease their representation in parliament — make their participation in any elections meaningless.

Znibate also listed other points of disagreement with the government, such as the worsening economic conditions resulting from the implementation of agreements with the International Monetary Fund and the hegemony of the executive authority over both the legislative and judicial authorities.

Znibate confirmed that the organisation's decision is not a declaration of war against the regime but a request for reforms. He explained that the Brotherhood has not substituted its reformist approach by a revolutionary one and will not resort to violence at any stage. "We are against violence and confrontation with the state. The government should not transform the battle into a confrontation with the Brotherhood because this will not resolve the crisis facing the country," he said. Znibate also claimed that "the decision to boycott the elections will lead to national unity among all opposition parties."

The Brotherhood called for a popular national conference with the participation of all political parties and professional associations in order to persuade the government to abolish all laws enacted by royal decree in the absence of parliament.

In the view of Saad Abu Dayyeh, a political scientist at Jordan University, due to the currently worsening economic conditions, it is in the interest of the state not to conduct elections in November. According to him, most of the demands of the Brotherhood are not new. The one-person one-vote system has been in effect in Jordan for the past four years with the IAF taking part in the elections, regardless of their declared political platform.

But a Jordanian government's statement on Tuesday said it would press ahead with parliamentary elections as scheduled regardless of whether Islamist candidates stand in the polls. "The government has studied the statement of the Muslim Brotherhood with an open heart but it is not persuaded by its justifications," the statement said. "The government believes that this statement is born of an internal crisis in the [Brotherhood] movement."

Moreover, the king's return to Jordan this week from a European tour coincided with intensive consultations between some of his senior advisers and leaders of the Brotherhood in an attempt to defuse the crisis. Prince Zaid Bin Shaker, the king's cousin and former prime minister, had been approached by Islamists to convey to the king their complaints, worries and points of view.



A uniformed Palestinian policeman orders a young boy off one of the large concrete blocks set up by the Israeli forces along the border dividing the Palestinian and Israeli parts of Hebron. More than 200 Palestinian policemen were deployed to bring calm to the volatile streets of the West Bank city *(photo: Reuters)*

Looking towards Israel's Jewish Arabs

The increasing division between Israel's secular and religious Jews, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, might help Palestinians in their peace talks with Israel. Graham Usher writes from Jerusalem

Last April the political leader of Israel's orthodox Shas Party, Aryeh Deri, addressed a mass rally at the Givat Ram sports stadium in Jerusalem. Before 20,000 or so adoring supporters, Deri launched a bitter attack on "secular Zionism".

The speech came three days after Deri was indicted for extortion for his part in the short-lived, scandalous appointment of Roni Bar-On as Israel's attorney-general. Deri, who was facing corruption charges, allegedly offered political support to Netanyahu in return for Bar-On's appointment. Bar-On had agreed to treat Deri lightly in court.

For Deri, the fact that he was indicted in the Bar-On affair — while Israeli leader Binyamin Netanyahu, Justice Minister Tsachi Hanegbi and Prime Ministerial Adviser Avigdor Lieberman were acquitted — was evidence of "ethnic persecution" by Israel's legal and political establishment, born of a hatred for "religion and Sephardi culture." Netanyahu, Hanegbi and Lieberman are Ashkenazim, or Jews of European descent. Deri and Shas are Sephardim, descendants of Jews who emigrated to Israel in the 1950s and 60s from Morocco, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and India.

Some Israeli commentators viewed Deri's attempt to play the ethnic card as simply a ploy to save his political skin. Others, however, see Deri's Givat Ram speech as signalling something altogether more significant. "It proclaimed the arrival of Shas and its Sephardi constituencies as a third force in Israeli politics," says Israeli political analyst Peretz Kidron. "At Givat Ram, Deri was saying that from now on Shas should be viewed on equal, not subordinate, terms with Israel's two main parties, Likud and Labour."

Established in 1984, Shas, which has two government ministers and 10 members of parliament, is already the most successful Sephardi movement in the history of Israeli politics. Shas's appeal is based on instilling in its followers a sense of ethnic and religious pride drawn from the 2,000 years of Sephardi Jewish history that preceded the advent of the European ideology of Zionism in the 19th century. But it has won electoral support for this return to faith through addressing the very real social problems facing Sephardi Jews in contemporary Israel.

These problems stem from the discrimination and inequality Sephardim face in a society still ruled economically, legally and ideologically by an Ashkenazi elite. According to the Adva Centre — an Israeli institute which researches inequality in Israel — the Sephardi-dominated "development towns" along Israel's borders register consistently higher unemployment and poverty levels than the Ashkenazi suburbs of Tel Aviv and Haifa. Although the Sephardim comprise around half of Israel's Jewish population, they account for only one quarter of all university students. Sephardim are also disproportionately represented in Israel's prisons, with most sentenced for the social crimes of delinquency, drug abuse and prostitution.

It is these communities that Shas has set out to save. Steered by the sage wisdom of Ovadia Yusuf (a former chief rabbi of the Sephardim in Israel and a world renowned Torah scholar), but driven by Deri over the last decade, Shas has established an array of grassroots educational, media, youth and women's bodies, providing services to a community neglected by Israel's state-run institutions. "The establishment should be ashamed of how it has behaved over the last 50 years," says Shas member of Knesset (Israeli parliament), David Tal. "We help the weak survive. We build their self-esteem. That helps them to help themselves."

A right-wing Israeli wearing a hat with a poster of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Israeli flags during a demonstration of settlers from Hebron and right-wing militants in Jerusalem. An Israeli border guard looks on *(photo: AFP)*

Yet, politically, Shas remains an enigma. On the one hand, Shas's pride in its Sephardi (and so largely Arab) heritage and hostility toward the Eurocentric biases of Zionism should indicate at least the possibility of a common cause with Palestinians, whether around the struggle for social rights inside Israel or progress in the peace process in the Occupied Territories. Shas was also the only orthodox party to be a member of the last Labour coalition government, voting in support of the Oslo Accords. On the other hand, Shas supporters express an almost ferocious hatred of the secularism associated with Israel's Meretz and Labour parties, a rift which, in the 1996 elections, drove them into the arms of Netanyahu's Likud-led coalition.

For Peretz Kidron, Shas' turn to the right in the 1996 poll was pragmatic. "Both Yusuf and Deri are aware that Shas' rank and file are more comfortable with Likud than the Ashkenazi-dominated Labour Party," he says. "Shas views nationalism as a legitimate tool if it helps to enlarge their electoral support."

But other Israeli commentators detect tensions at the heart of Shas' coalition with Likud. "Ovadia Yusuf's commitment to the peace process is principled," says David Landau, an Israeli author of a highly acclaimed book on orthodox Jewry in Israel, London and New York. The basis of this commitment is less tactical than theological, he says. "For Shas, the supreme religious value is Jewish life. If Jewish life can be saved by returning land to the Palestinians, then Shas is prepared to endorse territorial compromises in exchange for peace. This was the reason for Shas' support of the Oslo process. It is why Shas ministers and MPs still support the peace process today," says Landau.

There are signs that the Palestinian Authority (PA) is beginning to recognise Shas' pivotal importance in Israeli politics, if not to secure Palestinians' national rights, then at least as a potential ally to force Netanyahu to adhere to the terms of the Oslo process. In the last six months, Ovadia Yusuf has held meetings with the PA's chief of police in Gaza, Nasser Yusuf, and the PLO's chief negotiator, Mahmoud Abbas. There are also rumours of a meeting sometime soon between Deri, Yusuf and Yasser Arafat. But, says Palestinian political analyst Khalil Shakaki, such contacts should not be "just PR". They need to be part of an "overall Palestinian strategy" vis à vis the Sephardim in Israel.

"We can only talk to the Sephardi community if we make an effort to understand it," says Shakaki. "But Palestinians still don't really know the Sephardim's level of religiosity, or why so many Sephardi voted Shas in the last Israeli elections ... Yet this traditional and pragmatic community are precisely those Israelis the PA should be appealing to. We should not concentrate our efforts solely on the Israeli opposition of Labour, Meretz and the Arab parties."

Carving Palestine

Jebel Abu Ghneim is only the tip of the Israeli settlement iceberg, where hawks shriek and doves move softly

Immediately after he took office a year ago, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu spared no efforts to further expand Jewish settlements in occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinians have been warning that while world attention was focused on the building of the Jebel Abu Ghneim settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, the Likud government was expanding Jewish settlements all over the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Nearly every day, Palestinian and Israeli settlement monitoring groups publish reports containing evidence of permits allowing more housing units to be built in already existing settlements in the West Bank, such as Kiryat Sefer, Ma'ale Adumim and Karnei Shomron. Netanyahu, moreover, restored all the economic and social incentives given to settlers that were abolished four years ago by late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Underlining the Likud government's intractable position on the settlements was the appointment of extremist Ariel Sharon to head the newly-created Ministry of National Infrastructure.

After three decades of occupation, since the June War in 1967, the net result is a problematic Israeli population of settlers living in the midst of Arab towns and villages. Nearly 160,000 settlers live in 144 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza (excluding East Jerusalem); 200,000 live in 10 settlements in and around East Jerusalem; and approximately 140,000 live in 33 settlements in the Syrian Golan Heights. The huge number of settlers serves as a justification for Israel to claim large parts of the West Bank in the final settlement talks with the Palestinians, due to be concluded by May 1999 according to the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Even the most dovish political groups in Israel call for the annexation of the areas adjacent to the Green Line that marks the territories occupied by Israel after the June War. This area comprises 10 to 15 per cent of the West Bank and encompasses nearly 60 to 70 per cent of the settlers. In the opinion of these groups, other settlements in the midst of Arab towns and villages like Kiryat Arba' and Elon Moreh would be dismantled according to arrangements reached with the Palestinians.

The Israeli Peace Now movement has already suggested the evacuation of 26 of the smaller settlements (with a population of fewer than 500 residents each) accounting for 7,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank. According to Palestinian sources, solutions of this kind might be acceptable, with certain modifications, to the PLO.

Among other proposals which the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is reportedly ready to discuss is joint sovereignty over border areas, instead of their annexation to Israel. Under such an arrangement, settlers would become citizens of both Palestine and Israel. The PLO would also accept the option of allowing some of the settlers to stay if they became citizens of the Palestinian state.

What is detrimental to the PLO, however, is the proposal by Netanyahu and other hard-liners to annex some 60 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territories.

This settlement policy was not haphazardly executed. Indeed it was the product of endless deliberations and plans made by various Israeli governments. Labour, during its first decade in power after the 1967 war, focused on implanting its colonies along the buffer zones to separate them from surrounding Arab states, while discouraging, at least officially, settlement in the midst of populated Palestinian towns.

Likud's strategists, for their part, encouraged nationalist religious groups to settle in the West Bank which they consider to be an integral part of the historic "Eretz Israel" (Land of Greater Israel). Former Prime Minister Menachem Begin promised the settling of these areas in his election campaign in 1977 and successfully executed his objective once in office. His main aides in this drive were Sharon, the right-wing Gush Emunim group and Matityahu Drobles, head of the Department for Rural Settlement at the World Zionist Origination.

The inauguration of the peace process in Madrid in 1991 did not stop the Israeli government from building more colonies. Ironically, during the so-called "freeze" on settlements declared by former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the settlers' population in the West Bank and Gaza increased by 50 per cent. Israelis, therefore, jokingly refer to the difference between Labour and Likud with regard to settlements by saying that while Labour makes a single announcement to build 20 settlements, Likud makes 10 announcements for a mere two settlements.

The newly elected Labour leader Ehud Barak tends to agree with recently announced plans by Netanyahu advocating the annexation of 40 to 60 per cent of Palestinian territories. Even the most dovish Labour leader, former minister Yossi Beilin, has already declared his preference for the creation of large blocs of settlements annexed to the state of Israel following the final settlement with the Palestinians.

Reported by ***Rania El-Razaz***





WHILE the Iraqi athletic team was stranded at the Lebanese-Syrian border, after being barred from participating in the 8th Pan-Arab Games (far left), a woman in south Lebanon used the occasion to highlight the case of her son jailed by Israel for years without charge or trial. (photos: Reuters, AFP)

Ban clouds Pan-Arab Games

Politics mixed with sports before the opening of the Pan-Arab Games in Beirut this week as the Lebanese authorities banned Iraq's team from participating. Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut

Thousands of people converged on Beirut's newly-built stadium to attend the opening ceremony of the eighth Pan-Arab Games, a sign that Lebanon is slowly regaining its place in the Arab world after its long and bitter civil war. The Arab tournament is the largest sporting event to take place in the country since Lebanon hosted the first Games in 1957. The Games were to be held last September but were postponed because of financial difficulties.

But even before the Games started, the tournament was marred by a political crisis. More than 2,500 athletes from all over the Arab world came to participate in the event, but the Iraqi athletes were barred from competing under Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian pressure.

Nearly 100 Iraqi athletes were stranded for more than 24 hours at the Lebanese-Syrian border after being denied entry into Lebanon by immigration officials. The athletes travelled from Baghdad in three buses adorned with large posters of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. A Lebanese general security officer said they did not allow the Iraqis to cross the border because they had not been instructed to issue visas. Iraq put the blame squarely on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for the Lebanese decision to exclude its athletes from the Games.

According to Lebanon's Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz, Beirut was caught between trying to improve its relations with Baghdad or maintaining close ties with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The latter had made it clear that their athletes will boycott any event that include Iraqi athletes, meaning virtually all games. "Lebanon was left in a difficult position, inviting Iraq and would have lost the participation of countries whose relations with Lebanon are of paramount importance," Boueiz explained.

Lebanon is reluctant to upset Kuwait which, along with Saudi Arabia, has provided funds for Lebanon's reconstruction. They are also the only Arab countries to contribute financially to the rebuilding of the 50,000-seat sports stadium. "The initial cost of rebuilding the stadium was set at $75 million. Although a large number of countries pledged to help in the construction costs, only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait contributed money totaling $36 million," said Nabil Al-Jisr, the head of the Council of Reconstruction and Development.

The sports stadium, which was completely destroyed during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, is one of 20 stadiums in various Lebanese cities which were reconstructed or rehabilitated to receive the athletes for the Games.

An official Iraqi newspaper demanded that a complaint be lodged at the Arab League and the International Court of Justice against the Lebanese decision. Iraqi officials said that they received an official invitation from the Arab League, but the Lebanese authorities took a unilateral decision at the last minute.

Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid, who took part in the inaugural ceremony of the two-week tournament, tried to mediate to win approval for Iraq to join the Games, but his efforts failed. "There are complications regarding Iraq's participation and I understand the Lebanese considerations even though we had hoped all Arab states would attend the Games," he said after talks with Boueiz. Both failed to persuade Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to change their positions. Lebanon suggested a symbolic Iraqi participation with Iraqi athletes taking part and raising their flag during the opening ceremony only, but even that was rejected by the two oil-rich Gulf countries. "Unfortunately we remain captives of the polarisation that resulted from the Gulf War," Abdel-Meguid added. "What is now important is to turn this historic event, which will help bolster Lebanon's stature, into a big success," he said.

Juan Antonio Samaranch, the president of the International Olympic Committee, who is in Beirut for the opening of the Games, said that keeping sport and politics separate is not an easy task. "But I am confident Iraq will rejoin the sports world in a very short time," he told reporters.

During the inaugural ceremony, sports fans from Lebanon and the Arab world were cheering and waving flags as each of the 19 participating countries' delegations paraded on the green field. The Iraqi flag was nowhere to be seen. "There is no reason why Iraq should not be here," said a 29-year-old Lebanese who attended the opening ceremony. "This is a great event for the Arab nation. Politics and money should not be a reason to bar Iraq from participating. I wonder why they [the Arab governments] talk about Arab unity and its importance without respecting it," he said.

Speeches made during the opening ceremony stressed the necessity of closing Arab ranks in a bid to face regional challenges. Lebanese Education and Sports Minister Jean Obeid, for his part, said that the Arabs will continue their struggle to liberate territories occupied by Israel in south Lebanon, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. The officials who addressed the ceremony also highlighted Lebanon's achievements after years of hardship. "The mere fact that the Games are being held indicates to the international community the progress Lebanon has made in the past few years," Obeid said.

A break in the logjam?

The UN Security Council extended the five-year-old sanctions against Libya after a heated debate between Arab and African countries and the United States. Rasha Saad reports

In last week's UN Security Council meeting on the renewal of the five-year-old air and arms embargo against Libya, the United States discussed alternatives to lifting the sanctions for the first time since they were imposed. At previous meetings the decision to renew the sanctions was taken automatically within minutes.

Though the two-hour, closed-door meeting did not end up in Libya's favour and the embargo was extended for another three months, Nabil El-Araby, Egyptian ambassador to the UN, described it as a "positive step". El-Araby said that "after five years, the people of Libya are definitely entitled to a hearing on their sufferings."

The air embargo was imposed against Tripoli in April 1992 for refusing to hand over to either the US or Britain two Libyans suspected of bombing a PanAm flight in 1988 over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 270 people.

Libya insisted it would not hand over the suspects because they would not get a fair trial in either country. Libya's leader, Muammar Gaddafi offered three alternatives: to try the two suspects in The Hague by the International Court of Justice; to set up a special tribunal or to try them in any third country accepted by the Security Council.

All offers have been repeatedly rejected by the US, Britain and France, adding fuel to many Arab analysts' belief that Washington is punishing Gaddafi for his opposition to the Middle East peace process and his alleged support of so-called "terrorist groups."

The Security Council meeting last Thursday was the culmination of a concerted effort by Arab and African countries over the past year not to let the renewal sessions, which are held every three months, pass without any discussions.

Libya's envoy to the Arab League, Salma Rashed, said she appreciated the "unprecedented" discussions at the meeting but expressed disappointment that sanctions had still been renewed.

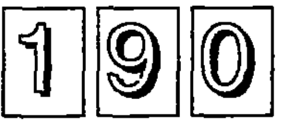
"We are disappointed by the US, British and French rejection of all the efforts exerted by the Arab League, the Organisation of African Unity, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement," she said.

At the recent meeting, Egypt, Kenya and Guinea-Bissau formally requested moves to eliminate the sanctions. The three countries also asked the Council to convene a special meeting to consider options to solve the crisis.

Rashed said that the Libyans expected that the West would finally agree to send a UN envoy to investigate the impact of the sanctions on the Libyan people and on neighbouring countries which traditionally trade with Libya. Such an investigation was, however, ruled out by the US and Britain.

Libya was also seeking an exemption from the air embargo for flights carrying Muslim pilgrims to Mecca and for those made for humanitarian reasons and official missions. To operate flights for humanitarian purposes, Libya must present an application to the UN Sanctions Committee for each separate case, the Security Council said.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Egypt's first club for university graduates and students was founded in 1905 with the backing of the Khedive Abbas. Under its founding charter, the club's activities were of a purely academic and social nature — no dabbling in politics or religion and no alcoholic drinks or gambling. The club's lecture programmes in Cairo were a roaring success, but attempts to duplicate them in the provinces failed. The club was short-lived, however, as it was plagued by frequent charges of political activism. Seizing on the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the government was only too glad to order the club to close down. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the *story from reports published by Al-Ahram*



Illustration by: Makram Hanein

At 4pm on Friday 8 September 1905, in the clinic of Dr Abdel-Aziz Nazmi, several young Egyptians met with the purpose of founding a club. Two weeks later, *Al-Ahram* readers would learn of the participants' resolution: to found an academic literary club in Cairo, to be called 'The Graduate Students Club'.

The purpose of the club, which was to be "located in a spacious and salubrious building," was to offer students of higher institutions of learning and their graduates premises where they could meet during their spare time in order to read newspapers and scholarly and literary works and discuss matters of academic and social interest. These matters, the resolution stressed, would not be "of a political or religious nature."

Not only would the club "greatly benefit the country," but it would also contribute to instilling among the young the spirit of community and mutual dependence, morally and sometimes materially. The drinking of alcohol and gambling were forbidden, as was "any activity that violates the morals and customs of this country."

The resolution adopted by the founding participants also called for lauching a fund-raising campaign "so that this noble enterprise can be established in an attractive and salubrious manner." It appealed to "the well-to-do, the patriots of the nation and the owners of newspapers to lend this enterprise whatever assistance you can." It added that donations were to be sent to Abdel-Aziz Nazmi, who had been unanimously elected as the club's temporary chairman. Newspapers would feature a daily column containing the names of the contributors alongside the amounts they had donated.

Al-Ahram ran a column featuring the names of contributors in order to encourage others to do likewise. In fact, it went further, praising the new venture in a lengthy front page article entitled, "The youth of Egypt in the field of politics."

The article said the objective was "to create a club for the graduates of higher institutions of learning. All Egyptians are eligible regardless of religious or denominational affiliation. In laying out the conditions for membership, they refused to accept the advice of any fanatic. This club is still in its infancy, but it is being well nurtured by the dedication and efforts of its founders, so that tomorrow it may grow strong and pursue the aims for which it was established. These aims are founded upon the principles of sincere love for our country, true tolerance, and the spirit of harmony among all religious denominations. The rising generation of Egypt today has had its say, for they represent the men of tomorrow and tomorrow belongs to them and not to their adversaries."

In subsequent editions, *Al-Ahram* printed lists of contributors to the newly-founded society. By the beginning of November they had raised LE281. In the 12 lists published until that time, it is interesting to note that there was not a single contributor of European or even Syrian origin, whereas these communities figured prominently among contributors to many other activities.

Also, given the explicitly secular character of the club, donations were drawn from relatively equal numbers of Copts and Muslims.

Most of the contributors were graduates from the country's three secular higher institutions of learning — the colleges of law, medicine and engineering. While graduates from the College of Law made up the majority, the initiative itself was fathered by graduates of the College of Medicine. Yet, there were some non-university graduates who supported the nascent club. One notes in this regard that *Al-Liwa*, the mouthpiece for the National Party, was even more ardent than *Al-Ahram* in its advocacy of the new club.

By 7 December, sufficient funds had been collected for the temporary steering committee to announce that "students and graduates of the higher educational institutes are invited to attend a meeting to be held at 9am tomorrow morning at the College of Medicine in Qasr El-Aini for the purposes of ratifying the charter, electing a board of directors and deliberating certain vital matters."

It was thus that on 8 December 1905 the Higher Educational Institute Club was born. Abdel-Rahman El-Rafie, then a student in the College of Law and later to become one of Egypt's finest historians, was present at that meeting. According to his account, Omar Lutfi, a graduate of the College of Law, was elected chairman of the club. He was a close associate of the nationalist leader and owner of *Al-Liwa*, Mustafa Kamel.

On 5 April, after four more months of raising donations and further preparations, the club opened in its new premises on Qasr El-Nil Street. Only hours before the inaugural ceremonies began, the newspapers announced that the Khedive Abbas had declared his backing for the new club. *Al-Ahram* wrote, "His Royal Highness has decreed that the name of the crown prince is to be registered in the Higher Educational Institutes Club and that LE100 is to be contributed to this club in the name of the crown prince." It is uncertain whether Abbas was personally taken by the idea of the club or whether he wanted to counter the influence of Mustafa Kamel in light of the deterioration of the relationship between them.

Whatever the case, the royal backing was bound to lend an atmosphere of pomp and luxury to the opening ceremonies. Foremost among the guests were the minister, deputy minister and British adviser to the Ministry of Education, the deputy minister of finance, the governor of Cairo and the minister and deputy minister of higher education. Following the speeches delivered by the chairman of the club and the minister of education, guests were given a tour of the premises. "They were highly impressed by this elegant and smartly designed building surrounded by a beautiful garden. It contains numerous spacious rooms, some of which were designed as sitting rooms, others as reading rooms and others for billiards and other permissible games. There are also several libraries containing large numbers of precious academic works. The club absolutely prohibits the drinking of alcohol and gambling."

The club membership increased dramatically in a short time. Opening with 240 members, its membership reached 471 by the end of 1906, 549 by the end of 1907, 685 by the end of 1908 and 773 by the end of 1909.

The club was also very efficiently organised, as can be noted from *Al-Ahram*'s coverage of the annual general assemblies. Typically, the first item of business in these meetings was a progress report presented by the chairman or secretary. In his 1907 report, for example, Omar Lutfi gave a brief account of "activities undertaken by the board of directors over the previous year, the number of new members, and the number of lectures given." Following this, "the treasurer summarised the finances of the club and presented the new budget for ratification."

The club's directors served a one-year term. Thus, in the 1907 general assembly, "the members of the board withdrew and votes were cast to elect a new chairman. Omar Lutfi won the absolute majority of votes which was received with applause and jubilation."

Although the club fostered numerous activities, we observe from *Al-Ahram* reports that the lecture series it organised figured most prominently. For its part, *Al-Ahram* was keen to assist the club's officials in expanding this activity and therefore conferred its blessings upon "the invitation to scholars and learned men to deliver literary and scientific lectures in this club. It is our hope that this activity will proliferate since education by speech is more effective than education by books."

The newspaper frequently covered the lectures that were given at the club. So successful was the lecture series that some members attempted to reproduce the experience in the provinces during the summer holidays. Unfortunately the attempts were not always successful. While on holiday in his home village of Akhmim, one member invited some of his fellow citizens to hear him deliver a lecture on "The unity of races." According to *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Akhmim, "there were many people present who accused the lecturer of bias against both Christians and Muslims."

There were also enthusiastic attempts on the part of secondary school students to form a club on the model of the Graduates of Higher Educational Institutes Club. On 20 February 1907 *Al-Ahram* reports that Dr Nazmi had opened his clinic for a meeting of secondary school graduates to discuss the issue.

The growing reputation of the Graduates of Higher Educational Institutes Club was not without attendant problems. The first problem was that the club's premises, "at 4 Qasr El-Nil Street near the Savoy Hotel," were becoming increasingly unable to cope with its growing membership. "It has become something of a small college in which learned men deliver lectures on numerous philosophical, literary, scientific and historical topics. One would hope that the members of this club find a helping hand in order to enable them to expand their premises and increase the numbers of lecture halls."

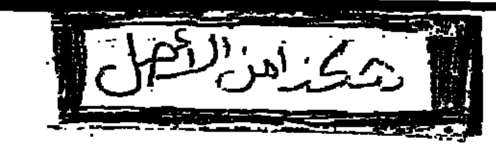
Restricted space often forced the club to hold its meetings on other premises. Grumbling about lack of space continued until May 1908 when *Al-Ahram* announced that the club would host a festival in the Continental Hotel "on the occasion of the revelation of a grand surprise." The celebration was attended by "prominent dignitaries, members of the press and devotees of science and literature." Following several introductory speeches, Omar Lutfi announced the surprise: "a munificent donation from Prince Youssef Kamal. This noble and benevolent young man in whose veins courses the blood of Mohamed Ali... was moved to present to the club 1,200 metres of his property which is situated in one of the most beautiful locations in Cairo. It is in Munira, in which is found numerous institutes of learning such as Dar Al-Ulum, the Nasseriya School, the College of Medicine, and the French Missionary School with its splendid library." The prince's generosity did not stop there. He also donated LE1,000 towards the construction of a new club as well as "an abundant library of Arabic and foreign works selected by his cousin Prince Haidar Fadil."

The club's second major problem was related to its connection with politics. There were two main trends that vied with one another in the course of the club's activities. One favoured political involvement while the other insisted that the club should adhere to its founding principles. The first camp consisted mostly of law students and graduates, among whom was Omar Lutfi, the chairman, as well as a number of prominent lawyers. The period in which the club was founded was characterised by the growing tide of Egyptian nationalism.

Periodic tensions would surface between the members of this camp and those members who preferred to adhere to the principle "not to become involved in political or religious matters." A blatantly political incident occurred at the outset of 1909 when *Al-Mu'ayyid* accused the club of being "a political society the membership of which is made up entirely of members of the National Party and which refuses membership to anyone not affiliated with that party." In spite of the club's denials of this accusation, the taint of political activism remained hanging over their heads. It was for this reason that the authorities were only too eager to use the outbreak of war in 1914 and the declaration of the British protectorate over Egypt as a pretext to have the club closed down.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



The crisis of modernity and other common grounds

As a conference on Islam and the West convened in Cairo this week, **Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri** remembered a similar gathering where Muslim and Western intellectuals discovered surprising similarities, and discarded the same old differences



A conference on Islam and the West held in Cairo last February, under the sponsorship of the 21st Century Trust, was, to my mind, one of the most seminal and interesting of the many gatherings on the same theme.

The topic of "Islam and the West: clash points and possible dialogue" (the title of the Cairo seminar), brought together participants of various nationalities, races and age groups. This diversity notwithstanding, there emerged a community of discourse. No sharp lines of demarcation were drawn between a hypothetical "me" and an equally hypothetical "other". The participants were not plagued by the urge to score an academic point, nor were they afraid to experiment with ideas. There was a definite openness, a willingness to listen, challenge, interact, deconstruct and reconstruct.

Each participant gave his or her personal views of "the other" in an open and candid way. This set the right tone: the conference was exploratory and mutual, not dogmatic or confrontational; it was an opportunity to explore ideas, not a platform to state a position or to draft a final communiqué.

In order to avoid conveying the wrong impression, it should be pointed out that there was one point of radical disagreement: the place of the relative and the absolute (and the related themes of the primacy of society over the individual, and permanence as opposed to change). The Western participants seemed unable to conceive of absolutes and permanent values. Their commitment to ideas of permanent change and absolute relativism were so fundamental that there was no space left for any certainty. Some of the Muslim participants (or, rather, the participants who operated within an Islamic frame of reference) failed to understand this zealous adherence to the relative and to the autonomy of the individual and his primacy over the community.

The dichotomy, however, was confined largely to the abstract, philosophical level rather than the more concrete level of immediate issues, pragmatic problems, and human considerations. Many participants — almost all, in fact — crossed "party lines" once the philosophical level was left behind. "Fundamentalist" relativists and individualists spoke of the need for moral values and the reassertion of the communitarian. Islamists voiced their concern for the absence of respect for private space in the Muslim world and the inability on the part of many Muslims to accept variety and a measure of relativism.

The participants managed to escape two premature closures: the Huntington thesis and the problem of images and stereotypes. The Huntington thesis, the product of a very sterile and reductive view of history and international relations at the present time, presents a closed system that precludes dialogue, postulating conflict (the clash of civilisations) as inevitable. Huntington at times backtracks and talks of the need for (and the possibility of) mutual understanding, even counselling the West not to arrogate for itself the position of centrality. I consider these warnings empty words — *aqwal* in the Arabic lexicon — that do not in the least alter the core of the argument, nor the structure and logic of the discourse; this, in Huntington's case, remains confrontational and conflictual.

Huntington's argument kept coming up, but it was marginalised: the participants and the speakers felt that it did not correspond to the concrete realities of the world around them. Conflict, it was argued, is always a definite possibility and a real aspect of our modern world, but it is not necessarily inevitable. Therefore, there was a general feeling that it is more useful to explore the causes of conflict, its history and its likelihood with a view to finding ways of dealing with potential conflicts and developing solutions, or at least strategies for mitigating the likelihood of a clash.

The issue of image-forming and stereotyping was also discarded fairly quickly. Most conferences on Islam and the West are bogged down in discussions of this topic and related themes: the history of image-making, defensive attitude, the sense of guilt, mutual apologies, recommendations for a fairer and more balanced view of the other, the need for tolerance, etc. The examination of the image of "the other" is both too abstract and too subjective. Usually, it is hopelessly locked in the past and/or the psyche; in other words, it is a closed system.

The Cairo seminar started off at the same point, but this soon became a pretext to examine and discuss more concrete structural issues that have bearing on the present and, hopefully, the future. The discussion of images and stereotypes was quite nuanced. Participants pointed out that the image of the other differs according to economic and social standards, levels of culture, and degrees of exposure to other cultures. But we also agreed that, in the last analysis, the image of the other is almost always stereotyped along reductive lines, and that the political plays a determining role. Where political tension exists between cultures, negative stereotyping becomes more dominant and central. Various ways of avoiding reductive, totalising stereotypes (the media, educational programmes, cultural exchange) were recommended.

A deeper and more complex sense of the history of the other would be a definite antidote. A monolithic view of "the other" is the basis of reductive stereotyping. Therefore, an awareness of others' multiplicity, variety, and complexity should be encouraged. The West, it was pointed out, is not one West; it may be humanist, conservative, reactionary, etc. The Western self-critique of modernity, furthermore, is very sophisticated and has gradually gained wider acceptance in the West itself. A strong mystical tradition coexists with more rational, utilitarian trends in the West, which is currently in the throes of a religious revival.

The same is true of the Islamic world. There are many Islamic religious traditions. A populist Islamic movement coexists with more politically and intellectually conscious movements and organisations. The first might occupy centre stage and attract the attention of the media, always on the lookout for "hot news and views", but political and intellectual Islam are far more effective in shaping the general direction of society, and perhaps its decision-making mechanisms. Attitudes to the West in the Islamic world range from whole-sale, unqualified rejection to equally unmitigated acceptance. Between these two extremes, there are more relaxed attitudes. The world of Islam is well-known for its spirituality and mysticism, but it also has a very important tradition of rationalism (as evidenced by the Mu'tazilites, Averroes or Ibn Khaldun), a tradition inherited and developed by many modern secular and Islamic thinkers in the contemporary world of Islam.

One way to avoid facile stereotyping is to try to view the West and the world of Islam each in relation to the other. The two have always interacted, even during times of confrontation and active conflict. Neither world is an organic, self-referential, self-explanatory whole; each contains within itself elements from the other, and each is exposed to the other through more or less obvious channels. There are hundreds of thousands of Western "experts", teachers, workers and advisors at every strategic point in Islamic societies. Millions of Muslims (actually, most of the ruling elites in the world of Islam) have espoused, consciously or unconsciously, the modern Western outlook. The vast majority is exposed daily to Western cultural artifacts ranging from Mozart to Michael Jackson and from French cuisine to McDonalds (albeit more Jackson and McDonalds than Mozart and *escargots*).

The same is true of the West: Western modernity has drawn upon many of the achievements of "Islamic" science and the insights of Islamic rationalism. Moreover, a few million Muslims now live in the Western world, forming probably the largest non-Christian religious minority there.

Another strategy for breaking down the process of mutual stereotyping is to try to find commonalties between the West and the world of Islam. It is within such a frame of reference that both worlds can exchange ideas and engage in dialogue. Disagreements will undoubtedly persist and divergences between world outlooks will continue, but many points of convergence regarding basic premises and tenets will be uncovered.

A repertory of themes that would interest both worlds could serve as an excellent starting point. The theme of "modernity and its discontents" is a prime candidate. Modernity is the overarching paradigm of our "modern" world; our achievements and crises are those of modernity. Crises do take different forms, according to the levels of modernisation and secularisation, but the underlying paradigm is one and the same.

The progressive Christian Western critique presented at the Cairo seminar is an excellent example of a point of convergence. The situation in the wealthiest, most modern and advanced society in the 20th century is far from satisfactory: the fastest growing sector in the US is that of prison construction; growing class polarisation is tearing Western society apart; medical service, especially for the needy, is declining; urban areas are plagued by rising crime rates; more and more people are moonlighting to make ends meet; growing privatisation has resulted in the state's gradual withdrawal from "public" life; many social programmes designed to aid the needy, minority groups and senior citizens have been slashed, while the power of big business continues to grow; the "pleasure sector", motivated mainly by profit, caters to the spirit of consumerism and utilitarianism; corruption in the political system is rife; election expenses continue to rise, making it impossible for voices from outside the established order to enter the political arena; voters grow more disaffected and disillusioned; right wing militias proliferate... The list goes on.

'One way to avoid facile stereotyping is to try to view the West and the world of Islam each in relation to the other. The two have always interacted, even during times of confrontation and active conflict. Neither world is an organic, self-referential, self-explanatory whole; each contains within itself elements from the other, and each is exposed to the other through more or less obvious channels'

The promise of modernity and the Enlightenment, of a society able to grow continuously, based on reason and justice, guaranteeing security for all, has hardly been fulfilled. All this calls for a critical revision of the American and Western dream, not for the benefit of Western man but also for that of the peoples of the world of Islam, who dream of catching up with modernity.

The theme of modernity and its discontents led to a discussion of a number of related themes that proved to be real points of convergence.

Globalisation, the highest stage of modernity, for instance, was seen as a mixed blessing. The participants felt that certain specificities and boundaries are being eliminated, which represented a definite loss.

The same could be said of the disappearance of mediating institutions, such as neighbourhoods, small towns, and kin relations, and their replacement by "rational", state-run institutions.

The community as a whole has been undermined in favour of a society of citizens based on contract and run by the central nation-state. Communitarianism has been replaced by self-interest and a narrow utilitarianism.

The family was seen as one of the casualties of modernity. The Islamists suggested that the issue of women's rights should be seen not in the context of the woman as an individual, but as a member of a human community. The family, not the individual, should remain the main analytical unit in monitoring and studying social phenomena.

The individual is a creature of modernity: denigrated when the issue was the family and the community, the individual was elevated when the issue was human rights. Individual human rights and the need for a coherent theory were something that all agreed on: in other words, it was a definite point of convergence. But it was also argued that human rights without a counterbalancing view of duties and a sense of human responsibility lead to the atomisation of the community, and ultimately to its atrophy and disappearance.

Democracy is another theme related to modernity. It was pointed out that the relationship between democracy and development is not inevitable. Many societies achieved development under authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, the participants agreed that some form of democratic government makes for a more humane society. It was pointed out, however, that the West claims to be democratic while backing totalitarian, oppressive regimes in the Islamic world, and makes human rights subservient to its own economic and political interests. The West is also most undemocratic in managing international relations and takes a highly relativist approach to the issue of human rights.

Another by-product of modernity is the ecological crisis which threatens human life on this planet. This aspect of the discussion brought into focus, in an immediate and concrete manner, the simple and central idea of a common humanity and a human community: simple ideas that were forgotten after years at military conflict (imperialism, two "world" wars, wars of liberation, etc.). This realisation might put the conflict between the Islamic world and the West in a proper perspective, blurring simplistic polarities.

The most sweeping consensus related to the growing power of the central nation-state and its security, educational and information systems, a true leviathan capable of reaching any citizen anywhere. In its early stages, secular discourse evoked a "separation" between church and state; no one dreamed, at the time, that this would lead to the state's "domination", not only of the church, but also of society as a whole.

An Islamist speaker argued that the basic problem of modernity in the Muslim world is the attempt to import and Islamise the concept of the central nation-state. The very logic of the central state, its structure and dynamics, the speaker argued, militate against ideas of selfhood, values and responsibility, and subvert any mediating institutions. In other words, the state leaves no space. As such, it is the institution most closely resembling the state of nature. Instead of natural law dominating man, state laws and institutions encircle the individual, charting his course for him in both public and private life.

Lenin spoke of the withering away of the state, but the opposite has occurred: the gradual atrophy and eventual withering away of the individual and the community. Both the public and private spheres have been "colonised" by the state (to use Jurgen Habermas's expression). The growing centralisation of the state, it was suggested, has led to the rise of ethnic particularisms, a reaction to the generalising and standardising tendencies generated by the process of centralisation.

How, then, can we tame the state? How can we force it to operate within its own sphere (defence, foreign affairs and large public works that private capital cannot undertake), free the private and public spheres from its grip, and replace the collective with the communitarian?

Modernity is almost synonymous with secularism. The promise of secularism (social peace and tolerance), it was argued, has not been fulfilled. Racial violence is a fact of life in many Western societies that were secularised three or four centuries ago. Western societies may have tolerated non-Muslim religious minorities, but when it comes to Muslim minorities, its record leaves much to be desired. Secularism in the Islamic world does not fare any better. Secular regimes in the Muslim world are among the most oppressive and authoritarian (and these are the regimes most strongly supported by Western democracies).

These discussions made it obvious that a radical re-examination of the premises underlying secular theory and practice is necessary; they also underlined the need for a new social contract in the post-secular era, a contract that would create a space of mutual respect and freedom for both the religious and the secular.

The issue of what Muslims and Westerners can learn from each other was raised quite naturally. The West has developed stable institutions but, given its extreme individualism and commitment to relativism, the institutions have no firm philosophical basis, and therefore stability is threatened. Islam, on the other hand, has a firm value system, but not the institutions to translate it into social realities. The same applies to ideas of individualism and communitarianism. While there is a strong sense of community in the Islamic world, and a weaker sense of the individual and private space, the situation is quite different in the West. This is another area where each side can learn something from the other.

The "theological" questions of good, evil, freedom of the will and predestination took a different form at the seminar. Are modernisation and globalisation intrinsically beneficial (good) or detrimental (evil) to mankind? If they are evil, do they constitute a reversible process (freedom of the will) or are they irreversible (predestination)? In response to these and other questions, the participants crossed party lines in a most chaotic manner. It was interesting to see Muslims speaking of irreversibility (modernity being the fate of man) and Westerners referring to the possibility of reversing some or all of the aspects of modernity.

Open structures are a good idea, but an open-structure is still a structure, whereas complete openness negates the very idea of structure. These are the biases of an Islamic humanist, committed to ideas of absolute moral and human values. This remark is expressly intended to contextualise the conference's recommendations by uncovering the underlying epistemological assumptions. Hopefully, this will not result in complete relativism.

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Morality on the firing line

Violence and lawlessness in Pakistan imperil the country's chances for reform, writes **Eqbal Ahmad** in Islamabad

Hope is a hardy, life-giving sentiment. It sustains individuals and communities *through suffering and* disasters, in hard times and cruel times. When hope dies, the will to live, resist, improve life and build society collapses, and people, nations and states go to rot. Hope draws on signs, on small indications that good has not been entirely overwhelmed by evil, that rescue is possible and that life may be normal again.

Forces, most evil and foul, have joined hands to kill hope in Pakistan. They are now targeting for murder the few truly moral men and *women in that country. The divided* state apparatus appears to be either allied with them or helpless to prevent their crimes.

On a flight from Beirut to Karachi, *I learned about the assassination of* Malik Shahid Hamid, a kinsman whom I knew to be a dedicated civil servant and a man of integrity. Hamid had no personal enemies. He was killed only because he was committed to doing his duty, namely, to ensure that electricity is efficiently provided to Karachi's businesses and residents and that the industry is free from corruption and fraud. Here is but one indicator of organised robbery in this sector. During 1995-1996, public expenditure on improving *electric supplies in* Karachi was about $600 million. Yet the "line losses" — read theft — during this period increased from 23 to 34 per cent of the total supply. Since his appointment *in December 1996* as head of Karachi's Electric Supply system, Shahid Hamid had been plugging the enormous leak, to the detriment of the political and financial mafia.

Three days after Hamid's murder, there was a gun assault on Navaid Husain, an architect friend of mine who was founder of Shehri, a non-profit organisation which monitors and protests illegal constructions of high rises and unsafe buildings. He had earned the enmity of real estate *interests in Karachi.* As Navaid fights for life in the Agha Khan Hospital, other members of Shehri are *menaced with threats.* Even Karachi's few honest police officers are under gun assault nearly every day.

The message of these broad daylight murders in Pakistan's metropolis, *and increasingly in other* cities, is scary. Morality is on the firing line. Karachi's mafia is determined to get rid of those men and women who dare serve the public interest. *The state is unable to protect* them.

This development started some time ago. In a mere five years of misrule, between 1972 and 1977, Z A Bhutto *demoralised* the bureaucracy and conditioned it to work for individuals rather than the state. He also began the process of integrating crime and politics. Ziaul Haq, his successor and tormentor, not only built on Bhutto's legacy, but also improved upon it in a myriad of evil ways, all under the rubric of "Islamisation and Jihad in Afghanistan."

Pakistan's tragedy is that his elected successors have done nothing to undo this legacy.

The *hadood* and *qisas* Ordinances (Islamic Penal Code) are still part of our legal system. According to these ordinances, a woman's testimoney in court is worth half that of a man. Also, *a murderer is allowed to pay* off the victim's family. Such laws reduce citizens rights and give licence to kill. The Blasphemy Laws remain in force, a permanent invitation to witch hunts against the seculars.

The country overflows with guns and drugs, both gifts of the Jihad in Afghanistan. Upper class official lawlessness continues unabated. Count the number of upper class convicts in Pakistan's jails. Or simply take a walk in Islamabad's affluent districts, where garden enclosures extend on to the footpaths. Do that and you have the portrait of an elite that has placed itself above the law. Official rhetoric concerning law and order *will remain meaningless* as long as lawmakers enjoy immunity from the law.

These are self-evident truths. The Pakistanis acknowledge that the country's problems have been brought about by the utterly mindless venality of our ruling establish*ment.*

We also know that two men, a civilian and a soldier, did more than most to get this country slipping downhill and that this decline can*not be reversed without radical re*forms and restructuring of both state and society.

None of these reforms would be possible without a modicum of moral renovation among Pakistan's governing classes. The alternative to renewal and reform is revolution, of which there is no trace on the Pakistan horizon.

Yet, something new is happening in this country. Hamid and Navaid are the latest symbols of it. As corruption worsened, the idea of reform has been put on the national agenda by a handful of journalists and social activists. Those individuals have exposed the rampant abuse of power and brought to light the perils inherent in the rise of sectarian groups and ideologies: the evildoing of landed and commercial interests; and the violence, theft and other damage that the public and private *syndicates have been inflicting upon* the state and society.

The reformists' material achievements are but few and negligible in comparison with the enormity of the challenges this country confronts. Their greatest contribution has been to set examples of lives in the service of society, to provide models of integrity of lives well-lived without greed, and to convey the belief that social and economic amelioration is necessary and possible. They have contributed greatly then to promoting the idea of reform and to keeping hope alive.

Pakistan's politicians have been quick to sense the appeal of reform. Ms Benazir Bhutto ran her second *successful electoral campaign on the* platform of a "new social contract" involving a significant restructuring *of power and politics.* It is another matter that her notion of social contract was as sophomoric as her plan for restructuring was skewed. Similarly, Mr Imran Khan entered pol*itics with stirring promises* of renewing Pakistan's original mission and reforming its decaying institutions and unjust distributive arrangements. But Imran Khan wasted *his energy in a negative campaign* of denouncing the misdeeds of his opponents. Mr Nawaz Sharif concentrated, by and large, on projecting a positive, reformist image. *The electorate rewarded him* handsomely. He renewed his election campaign promises most forcefully and eloquently in his inaugural speech as prime minister. Hope was aroused to Himalayan heights. "A new era or flash in the pan?", I had then asked in this space on 2 March. And two months later, on 4 May, another positive assessment yielded another question: "Will quiet revolution continue?"

Two more months and the indicators, I am saddened to note, are not encouraging. True, Mr Nawaz Sharif assumed the command of a leaking ship. A country's structure stands on three pillars: economy, state, and social peace. From years of irresponsibility and corruption, all three pillars were shaky when Sharif assumed power. One should not judge his government by absolute standards. His finance minister appears to be *doing the best* one can with a seriously enfeebled, yet globalised, economy of a country whose propertied classes are not given to paying taxes. But the performance indicators in the other two related areas — state and social peace — are very poor indeed. The foremost task of government is to ensure that the law and its conventions are respected and that all citizens are equal before the law. Unless it does that, the government would lose momentum and cred*ibility.*

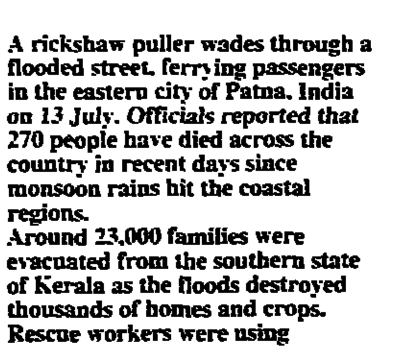
I sat in a state of shock as three retired civil servants of high rank identified men on bail for criminal charges, who are ministers in the federal and provincial cabinets; yet another occupies the office of Speaker in a provincial assembly. Not a violation of law certainly but as surely an impropriety not calculated to affirm the rule of law, or convey the image of an upright government.

Or take the case of Aimal Kansi. *Agents of the American CIA* apprehended Kansi recently on Pakistani soil and flew him off to the US. We all know the United States to be a great power not very mindful *of the constitutions of other coun*tries. Yet, we devalue our constitution and laws by aiding a foreign power to abduct — I cannot find a softer word — a Pakistani citizen without due process.

Or, take the accountability process and its relation to the state-controlled Pakistan TV broadcasts. The accountability cases have barely opened in the courts. The prime minister's law adviser openly admits that the government is still gathering evidence and that this is not an easy task. Yet, a trial by broadcast, especially of Benazir Bhutto and her husband, is allowed to go on.

The point of citing these examples is to underline two simple realities: First, these an1l∞iny other decisions and policies of Mr Nawaz Sharif's government, including his latest cabinet expansion, suggest that what had appeared initially to be a *new beginning in Pakistan's history* may turn out, after all, to be a "flash in the pan."

Second, as a way to both minimise this loss and also to compensate for it, the movement for reforms must be accelerated in the cities, provinces and the country. It is a difficult, daunting challenge as decay and corruption have brought to ruination nearly all aspects of national and social life. Yet, history has always favoured those who, against all odds, take up the challenge of renew*al and reform.*





A rickshaw puller wades through a flooded street, ferrying passengers in the eastern city of Patna, India on 13 July. *Officials reported that* 270 people have died across the country in recent days since monsoon rains hit the coastal regions.
Around 23,000 families were evacuated from the southern state of Kerala as the floods destroyed thousands of homes and crops. Rescue workers were using make-shift boats to ferry food to marooned villagers, said witnesses. Monsoon rains also hit Bangladesh, where more than 100 people died. *At least six army helicopters* carried dry food to villagers stranded in areas where the flood waters were so high and fast that rescue boats could not be used. Soldiers were helping local rescue teams in most areas. The rains which started Tuesday 8 July, have hit 21 of Bangladesh's 64 districts — displacing an estimated 2 million people *(photo: Reuters)*

A moral arms trade?

Will Britain's new foreign policy, which aims to adopt a tougher line on arms exports to regimes that violate human rights, be applied equally to all buyers? **Doaa El-Bey** reports from London

Arms exports to regimes that violate human rights are to be more rigorously controlled under Labour's new foreign policy, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook declared in June. "Our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support other people's demands for the democratic rights which we insist on ourselves," he said. However, experience has shown that it is not always easy to bring principles to the forefront when huge financial interests are involved.

Given the fact that Britain's defence industry is a strategic and vital part of its industrial base and that it is the second largest *arms exporter* in the world after the United States — arms sales raised 5.1 billion pounds sterling last year — bringing an "ethical dimension" to the arms trade could be fraught with problems. To compound matters, orders for UK equipment by Middle Eastern states account for more than half of all British arms sales. According to sources at the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Middle Eastern orders averaged 3.3 billion pounds sterling each year for *the last three years. This massive* volume indicates the major financial obstacle to reviewing the criteria for exporting arms to Middle Eastern countries which are all accused by Amnesty International, the London-based *human rights* organisation, of violating human rights.

A Foreign Office official told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the criteria for exporting arms are still in the review stage but the most important thing is that "the principles are set. We will not export arms that are used by governments for internal repression or external aggression," he said. On the other hand, he emphasised that much consideration will be given to British industrial interests.

The MoD said that it is too early to say what the consequences of the review would be for export to individual countries but that the government follows specific rules on Middle Eastern states that are subject to UN or EU embargo, namely, Iran, Iraq and Libya.

An MoD official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the British government took a highly responsible approach to the sale of arms to regimes that might use them for internal repression or external aggression. He added that the government is committed to a strong British defence industry "as a strategic part of our industrial base" as well as to Article 51 of the UN Charter which affirms the rights of nations to self-defence.

He concluded that the government would continue to export defence equipment where it serves as a deterrent to conflict. However, he did not elaborate on whether these conflicts were internal or between countries.

The new foreign policy underlines the government's commitment to refusing export licences for the sale of arms to regimes that might use them for internal repression or international aggression; to preventing British companies from manufacturing, selling and procuring equipment such as electric shock batons, designed primarily for torture: and to increasing the transparency and accountability of decisions on export licences for arms.

The government also intends to publish an annual report on UK strategic exports which will be examined and debated in detail by parliament.

Amnesty International welcomed the new government's commitment to putting human rights at the heart of foreign policy and its promise to promote arms control actively. However, Amnesty expressed hope that the policy would not be compromised by the government's intention to use foreign posts to promote trade interests and recommended consistency in the application of policy on arms sales. Richard Bunting, an Amnesty International spokesman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that consistency was an important factor. "It doesn't matter whether it is an export to a big or small state, an economic power or a potential market, there must be one standard for all."

However, being consistent in implementing foreign policy is not the only difficulty facing the government. Another difficult task is effectively ensuring that the states that apply for weapons purchases from the UK are using them for defence purposes only and not for internal repression or the violation of human rights.

The Foreign Office spokesman admitted that this could be a problem but said that "we will rely on various forms of information and responsible officials' decisions before giving a licence to export." Amnesty International did not see it as an easy task. "It is very difficult to be 100 per cent sure, but the onus is on the British government to ensure that equipment exported is not contributing to human rights' violation. It has to create a mechanism, ask certain questions and use certain pressure to preserve human rights." Bunting said.

Another problem is the impossibility of scrapping major deals which are already licensed or concluded, as the arms companies would risk paying very high compensation.

Any attempts to reconsider or amend the 1992 Yamamah deal with Saudi Arabia, which brings in an annual revenue of two billion pounds sterling and guarantees 700,000 jobs for several years, or a one billion-pound deal with Qatar, concluded last year, are impossible.

Some political commentators hint at the *possibility that the new policy would* apply to light weapons and not the high-tech, expensive arms deals that constitute the backbone of the British defence industry.

Amnesty International called on the government to deal with all kinds of weapons equally, if they are being used to violate human rights. "It doesn't matter whether they are machine guns or electric shock batons," Bunting emphasised.

Another obstacle to the implementation of the new foreign policy is that it cannot prevent diversion of weapons to a third country. To avoid this, the government plans to strengthen the monitoring of the use of defence exports to prevent them ending up in a third country which might put them to ill-use.

The *Sunday Times* reported earlier this year that the chairman of a major arms company in Birmingham *revealed that in the last three* years his company had received five or six requests, from middlemen in Jordan and other countries, for spare parts for defence equipment that the company had previously supplied to Iraq. *The attempts indicated that the* Iraqi president had set up a network of companies, some based in Jordan, solely to provide spare parts for high-tech material banned under UN sanctions.

One further difficulty is *the absence of a* law that bans arms trafficking by British nationals, but the government is also planning to address this.

The new foreign policy has demonstrated — on paper at least — *the government's* intention to organise the export of arms, implement a consistent policy and avoid an "a la carte" policy, as Derek Fatchett, the minister of state for foreign affairs, put it. "The human rights agenda is very important to us, the ethical dimension is important. Our approach will not be 'a la carte' in terms of human rights, we will be universal in terms of application." Fatchett told a news conference earlier this month. However, only time will tell whether Labour will espouse an ethical foreign policy in practice or whether it will merely attach an ethical label to foreign policy whenever it is needed.

Children of the killing fields

The coup by Cambodia's second premier raises the spectre of still more bloodshed in a country long torn by rival factions. Faiza Rady reports

After two days of fierce fighting against troops loyal to the ousted first premier of Cambodia, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the second premier, Hun Sen, gained control of the capital *Phnom Penh and much of the rest of the country* this week. The prince's outnumbered troops retreated on Saturday and early Sunday, putting up only token resistance in the face of heavy artillery and rocket barrages, according to army commanders and eye witnesses.

Near Prey Chup, in northwestern Cambodia, Ranariddh's troops — backed by Khmer Rouge guerrillas — laid land mines along the road to slow down the advance of Hun Sen's army. However, despite their hasty retreat, the royalists still appear to have strongholds in the neighbouring rural provinces of Banteay Meanchey and Battambang, *military* observers reported on Tuesday.

Hun Sen, the leader of the Marxist Cambodian People's Party (CPP) — formerly the Communist Party, which was in power between 1979 and 1993 — denied that he initiated a coup to suspend the constitution and return to one-party rule. Calling on Ranariddh's party, the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), to choose a new premier, Hun Sen challenged reporters' allegations that he had seized power for his party. "Is it a coup when the constitution remains in place? No politician has been arrested. Political parties remain untouched," asserted Hun Sen.

Prince Ranariddh — who fled to Paris for safety just before *the fighting erupted* — should be extradited and returned to face charges of illegally negotiating with the outlawed Khmer Rouge guerrillas, importing weapons and moving troops into the capital, Hun Sen added. Attempting to prove these charges, he showed journalists a joint statement signed by Ranariddh and nominal Khmer Rouge leader, Khieu Samphan, which revealed that the two leaders were to meet in Preah Vihear near the Thai border to announce a formal alliance.

The Maoist Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, brutally transforming the country into a vast forced labour camp that resulted in the death of an estimated two million people. In the weeks before he was ousted, Ranariddh had been in the process of negotiating the handover of Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot with a dissident Khmer Rouge faction. Although Ranariddh denies any further involvement with the guerrillas, political observers are inclined to believe Hun Sen's contention that Ranariddh had indeed moved beyond the negotiation stage to renew his long-standing military *and political alliance with the Khmer* Rouge — threatening and finally rupturing the country's tenuous coalition government. "As early as June of last year, the FUNCINPEC was already scheming to reconstitute its political affiliation with the guerrillas," wrote Cambodia specialist Raoul-Marc Jennar.

The FUNCINPEC/Khmer Rouge alignment historically dates back to 1982 when the two factions started waging a CIA-funded war against the Cambodian Popular Democracy, a Marxist Vietnam-backed regime that overthrew the Khmer Rouge dictatorship. During the period of the American rapprochement with China, the US played the Maoist guerrillas against the Soviet-supported Marxist Southeast Asian camp represented by Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. *The US-fuelled civil war raged until 1991,* when the collapse of the Soviet Union signaled the end of the Cold War — ultimately transforming the political landscape.

Emerging as the sole power broker in the region, the US distanced itself somewhat from the infamous Khmer Rouge — banking instead on the less tainted leadership of Prince Ranariddh. Consequently, America persuaded the permanent members of the UN Security Council to sponsor peace negotiations in Paris, which led to a breakthrough accord in October 1991, followed by elections in 1993. Further prompted by the US, the UN heavily invested in Ranariddh's campaign — an investment which paid off when the FUNCINPEC won the legislative elections, securing 58 of the 120 parliamentary seats. Yet, despite the billions of *dollars poured into Ranariddh's electoral machinery*, the Western-brokered elections did not manage to eliminate the Marxists from the picture. Remaining in control of the army and the administration and empowered by a large grassroots constituency, the CPP challenged the election results — and succeeded, after a show of force, to effectively share power with the royalists on equal terms. As a result, the FUNCIPEC sought to strengthen its power base by scrambling for the support of the Khmer Rouge — their former allies.

Army Colonel Vuot Savuang of the CCP explained that it was the first premier's alliance with the Khmer Rouge that sparked off the conflict. "The anarchy of the Khmer Rouge, who were in this area, meant that poor people were robbed of their livestock and goods every day," he said.

Hun Sen responded to the human rights' organisation Amnesty International's concern for the safety of opposition leaders and political activists — many of whom had fled the country — by issuing a statement condemning any human rights abuses by the military. "Over the past week, after the armed clashes occurred, the government has taken immediate action in order to protect and maintain peace and safety in response to the concerns of the people in the international community," assured Hun Sen, adding that "the rights and freedoms of individuals from all political parties to express (their ideas) through the press or through meetings or non-violent demonstrations will be allowed."

The international community, on the whole, refrained from taking sides in the conflict. On Friday, the UN Security Council called on all parties to resolve differences through dialogue and reminded the Cambodians of their commitment to hold free and fair legislative elections next May. But the statement fell short of the strong public stand against the coup demanded by Prince Ranariddh during his meeting last Thursday with UN *Secretary-General Kofi* Annan. Speaking on condition of anonymity, Security Council diplomats said China and Japan had insisted on a watered-down statement, omitting references to a "military coup".

Following the coup, the US, Germany and Australia *suspended aid to Cambodia* and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) decided to postpone consideration of Cambodia's membership application "until a later date." The US also remained on the sidelines, painstakingly avoiding issuing any strongly-worded communiqués. The *Clinton administration* only announced the suspension of its $25 million in annual aid for a trial period of 30 days. "It's very important that we give diplomacy a chance... to see if there's any way that the 1991 (peace) accords can be preserved," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns. *He also publicly* distanced himself from the prince by acknowledging that "there have been mistakes all around the political spectrum in Cambodia, including those made by Ranariddh who toyed with a political alliance with the Khmer Rouge guerrilla group which was responsible for *more than one million* deaths (sic) when it ruled Cambodia." Although Burns went as far as criticising the FUNCIPEC's alliance with the Khmer Rouge, he was careful to omit any references to US involvement with and support of the genocidal regime.

Many analysts believe that the US casually dropped Ranariddh as a result of the new world order. Although some hard-liners like Asia expert Richard Fisher, of the Heritage Foundation, and Republican Representative Dana Rohrabacher, still insist that the US should send "a planeful of marines into Cambodia", *it is evident that the country has* lost its strategic value. Meanwhile the children of the 'killing fields' still face the tragic heritage of genocide and 30 years of civil war — fueled, financed and supported by foreign intervention.

Turning wishful thinking into reality

Confronted with what many view as the unsavoury option of regional integration before peace has crystalised, Arab countries are trying to revive a dormant decision to establish an Arab common market. But what has really changed?

Necessity is the mother of invention. This cliché, much like the concept for an Arab common market, is by no means new. The common market idea has been thrown around for the better part of 40 years, with no tangible results.

But under the framework of various bilateral economic agreements signed between Egypt and some other Arab countries, plus the debate surrounding the Middle East/North Africa economic conference series and building economic ties with Israel, the issue has again emerged. Now, however, it is with renewed vigour and urgency that both businessmen and politicians are tackling the issue.

"This time, we must make it succeed because we do not have another choice in order to be able to survive," said Mahmoud El-Arabi, head of the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce (EFCC).

An Arab common market, argued El-Arabi, would strengthen the Arabs' position internationally and increase the volume of inter-Arab trade, the level of which currently stands at 10 per cent of total Arab trade.

Encouraging inter-Arab trade and investment, added the EFCC head, is the cornerstone of establishing this common market.

These priorities have been evident for some four decades and yet the Arab common market has emerged as little more than wishful thinking.

Standing in the way of the formation of an Arab common market are several factors — few of which will be easy to resolve. And Ahmed Arafa, chairman of the EFCC's General Investors' Sector, is not entirely optimistic that the Arabs will be able to overcome the political and economic policy differences that obstruct the formation of even a customs union, let alone a common market. The customs union has been suggested as a possible precursor to the common market.

"The currencies of some countries, such as Libya and Sudan, have more than one price," said Arafa. "This presents Egyptian businessmen with a huge problem when they have to sell their goods at the official price," versus the black-market price. Other obstacles include a disparity in foreign currency reserves, huge budget deficits and unequal levels of economic growth and development.

The Foreign Ministry's Gamal Bayoumi, holds an opinion similar to that of Arafa. Bayoumi, who heads the Egyptian negotiating team in the Egypt-EU partnership agreement talks, believes that "what Arabs need is a customs union which not only lifts tariff barriers between Arabs, but also unifies the customs duties they impose on non-Arab countries."

To simply assume that a common market will emerge from a free trade area (FTA), however, says Bayoumi, would be a mistake. "I wouldn't vote for an Arab common market if its only aim is to establish a free trade area," said Bayoumi.

Setting up an FTA is relatively simple, he added. The real challenge lies in "bridging the gap between the developed and less-developed Arab countries, like the EU is doing with its Mediterranean partners." A first step in this direction, he recommended, would be to allow less-developed Arab countries to export to their wealthier Arab neighbours, without paying customs duties.

Other experts have advice to offer on the issue. To realise a high degree of economic integration and cooperation between the Arab countries, argued Medhat Hassanein, professor of economics at the American University in Cairo, there must be an easy flow of capital — especially private capital.

"Once we lift all restrictions on the flow of capital, we will open the door for an increase in the flow of labour and technology and, eventually, increasing the yields on Arab investments," he explained.

But even this is not trouble-free. According to Bayoumi, lifting all the barriers immediately could result in an increase in the flow of labour between Arab countries with which they will not be able to cope. This issue, recommends the Foreign Ministry officials, would best be introduced later. "If this issue is left for a later stage, the economies of these countries will have improved, and will be able to absorb the excess labour," stated Bayoumi.

Another issue that should be delayed until later is the movement of capital, says Bayoumi. In short, what the Arabs need to focus on first is the free exchange of goods. The next steps would involve the exchange of services, the movement of capital, the transfer of profits and, finally, the labour issue.

According to Abdel-Rahman El-Sohaibany, deputy secretary-general of the Arab League's Economic Affairs Department, "We have to first focus on a customs union, which would lead to a common market."

Once an agreement on the trade of goods is realised through a customs union, notes the AUC's Hassanein, Arab banks can be mobilised as the natural channels for capital transfer. At this stage, there must be some coordination in the fiscal policies of the various central banks in the Arab world as a prerequisite to unifying their monetary policies.

But still, argues El-Sohaibany, the emphasis must be "on lifting the customs barriers and unifying the tax regulations so that production costs are all the same."

Reported by ***Niveen Wahish, Mona El-Fiqi*** *and* ***Shereen Abdel-Razek***

China comes to Suez

A Chinese free economic zone is one step closer to completion in Suez, writes Rania Khallaf

Egypt's bid to woo foreign investors is starting to bear fruit. Responding to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's call last April during a visit to China, a delegation of Chinese industrial experts arrived in Cairo this week to explore the possibility of establishing a free trade zone north of the city of Suez.

The delegation's trip, which falls within the framework of an Egyptian-Chinese agreement to establish a free trade zone in Egypt, is only a preliminary step towards this goal. But Chinese officials are encouraged by what they found.

"The possibility exists that [through this zone] we could further enhance economic relations between the two countries," said Wan Jifie, viceminister of the Chinese Office for Special Economic Zones (SEZO). "The main objective of our visit to Egypt is to carry out the agreement between the two countries."

In accordance with the agreement, signed last April during El-Ganzouri's China trip, the Chinese delegation included officials from the Ministry of International Cooperation and representatives of SEZO. El-Ganzouri had offered Chinese businessmen and investors a package of incentives, including 20-year tax exemptions for mega-projects along the Nile. Egypt is also committed to establishing a number of free economic zones over the next two decades. The first would be the Chinese zone, and the second in conjunction with Singapore.

The location for the zone has already been selected — a site 44km north of Suez. The infrastructure needed to support the 4 million square metre area, and the estimated 490 factories to be built on it is being set up at a cost of LE125 million. And, according to Ministry of Industry officials, the area is rich in limestone and natural gas.

The Chinese, though encouraged by the project, are taking their time.

"Our main goal during this trip was to conduct feasibility studies," stated Jifie. "The second step will be to exchange ideas with Egyptian experts." Chinese experts are currently gathering data which will then be compiled into an assessment report that will be submitted to the Chinese government.

"Hopefully, we will be able to advise investors to invest in this promising area," added the SEZO official.

The enthusiasm on the part of the Chinese delegation is not merely a result of the resource base available or the incentives, but also the fact that the idea for such a zone was originally their own. El-Ganzouri, after touring several such zones in China last April, saw that the idea could be readily transferred and implemented in Egypt.

"'Many countries want to learn from our experience in operating economic free zones," noted Jifie. "But Egypt is the first country to benefit directly from our expertise."

The benefit seems to have extended even to the choice of site, which the Chinese experts found very appropriate. "The Egyptian experts have chosen the perfect location for this project because the area lies in the 'golden triangle' of the Suez Canal, connected to the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe," Jifie told *Al-Ahram Weekly* following his two-day visit to Suez.

These three continents constitute a vast market, he said, adding that "it might be better to conduct careful planning [before setting up the zone] in order to define reasonable targets and goals."

"It is also necessary for the Egyptian government to offer some special incentives to investors in this region," he was quick to suggest.

While the kinds of industries to be set up have yet to be determined, the Egyptians have put forth a number of suggestions, including cement, fertilisers and electronic equipment. These options are being considered by the Chinese. But, says Jifie, "the kind of industries to be set up in the area depend on the market."

"We should also keep an eye on the European and Asian markets in order to decide which industries are in most demand," he stated.

"Thorough research and studying the market are imperative before setting up this giant project," he stressed. "Chinese private sector companies will only be encouraged to invest if they are assured of a good industrial environment, good markets, a solid infrastructure and trade incentives, including favourable policies directed specially to this zone," elaborated Jifie.

The choice will ultimately be up to the companies themselves, he noted. And whether they invest or not depends on how much they stand to gain. China, however, will set up a businessmen's tour for private sector company representatives.

"If they are willing to invest, our government will support them," affirmed Jifie.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Import duties slashed

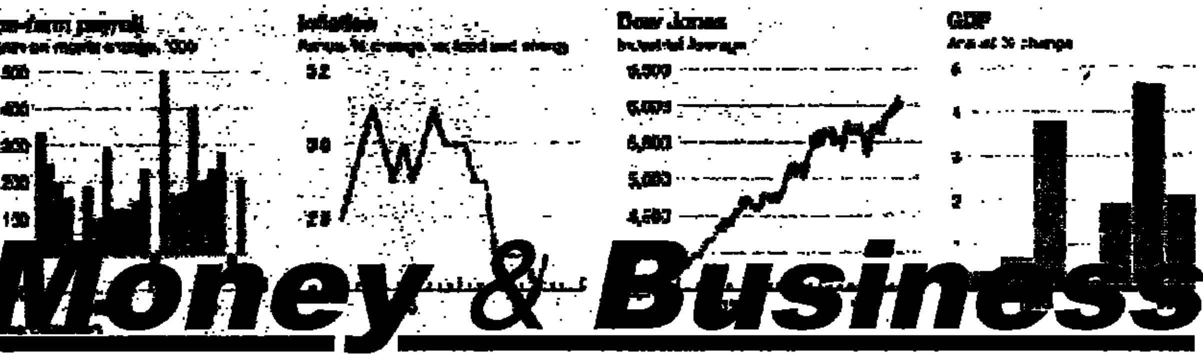
A PRESIDENTIAL decree issued this week has cut import duties on all electrical appliances and manufactured goods — with the exception of cars — by five per cent. The decree also stipulates the decrease of customs on imported production inputs for items with at least 30 per cent domestic components.

This latest cut effectively reduces the tariff ceiling for goods other than cars and luxury items to 50 per cent. The presidential decree comes as part of a broader programme to liberalise foreign trade, with the eventual aim of reducing the maximum tariff rates to 40 per cent.

Late last year customs were pared down from 70 per cent to 55 per cent, while the premium tariff on cars and luxury items decreased from 160 per cent to 135 per cent.

Helnan's hotline saves time

SAVING time and providing all means of comfort is an integral part of Helnan International Hotels' strategy. Therefore, the sales and reservation department of Helnan Hotel devised the "hotline system" which was first applied at Helnan Royal Beach in Ras Sidr. Both hotels provide special offers for two- or three-day accommodation or day use in the beautiful areas in which these hotels are located. Guests can enjoy all types of water sports, horse riding, tennis and table tennis. The hotline operates all week long with 7pm service.



Special invitation to businessmen

AIET is pleased to invite you to visit its permanent exhibition at 68 Road 105 Maadi, to examine the latest in computer technology. AIET offers what's new in the world of computers, with American-produced products. AIET also provides excellent customer support, offering free training seminars in DOS, Windows and MSWord, along with a 2-month free subscription to the Internet through Infinity, one of the largest Internet providers in Egypt. In addition, the company guarantees its products for 5 years, and offers product maintenance and service.

Towards a greater economic cooperation

ACCORDING to a publication of the Munich Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWI 6/97), the increase of exports from Germany to Egypt of over 20 per cent is probably going to bring total exports for 1996 to a total of about DM2.5 billion.

At the moment there is real growth of about 5 per cent in the Egyptian economy — at the beginning of 1997 the rate of price increases reached an all-time low — and the government budget almost balanced. The optimistic mood in the business world has prompted a strong increase in investments, benefiting all sectors of the Egyptian economy.

In order to promote export trade for German companies, the Cairo International Fair 1998 has been registered in the official 1998 Federal German Foreign Trade Fair Programme and IMAG Munich has once again been commissioned with the organisation for this officially sponsored participation.

The participation fees inside the hall, including booth construction, are DM310 per square metre (minimum area of 12 square metres) and for space outside DM155 per square metre (minimum area 20 square metres). The registration deadline is 2 October 1997.

German companies' representatives Egypt are now invited to take part in this international event within the official German Pavilion.

For further information as well as registration forms, please contact IMAG München (Herr Brukhardt, tel. 089/50061-24, fax. 089/5028497).

A successful exhibition in Portugal

IN FRONT of a crowd of visitors, Al-Ahram Products Exhibition in Portugal was inaugurated, with the Portuguese minister of labour and social affairs cutting the ribbon.

Among the dignitaries attending the event were Dr Mohamed Khairat, Egyptian ambassador to Portugal, Mongi Badr, head of the Egyptian Commercial Representation Office in Portugal, and Medhat Monsour, manager of Pyramids Advertising Agency.

The event gave Egyptian exhibitors and Portuguese businessmen the ideal opportunity for arranging business meetings. Portuguese importers whose representatives attended the meeting included: Mr Jose Lima, partner of Eng. H. Carvalho; Eduardo Ramalhao Ida; JR Representacose; Mr. Albino Matos, SICOR; Texties Manuel Concalves, TmG; MUNDIFIOS; Mr Joao Martins, OUTEX; Mr Francisco Sousa Countinho, BRIMIVEX and Teixeira, Monteiro and Mendes, TMM.

Governor of Faisal Islamic Bank visits the Islamic Development Bank

DR AHMED Mohamed Ali, head of the Islamic Development Bank in Sabah, met this week with Abdel-Hamid Abu Moussa, governor of Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt. The two discussed the banks' cooperation presently taking place, as well as means of boosting and increasing this cooperation in the future. Talks also focused on financing for development projects in the Islamic world, either through the investment fund of the Islamic Development Bank, or via the Islamic banks' portfolio which the bank manages.

Moussa, on this occasion, expressed his deep appreciation for the important role that the Islamic Development Bank plays in the area of boosting economic and social development in Islamic countries. Likewise, he commended the current level of cooperation taking place between the two banks, commenting on the increase of development services in Islamic countries.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Bricks and glass houses

Some may deem it appropriate that the subject of this year's Islamic conference in Cairo is Islam and the West. Without a doubt, certain misunderstandings about the faith have emerged over the past few years, rivaled only by the exacerbation of more dated misconceptions.

President Mubarak has stressed during the conference this week that the West must seek to overcome it biased view that, with the end of the Cold War, Islam has emerged as its key opponent. Civilisations, argued many of the participants, need not clash but cooperate.

Unfortunately, despite much rhetoric about the emergence of the global community and a new world order, events over the last few months — especially with regard to the peace process — have proven that civilisations seemingly must clash. Had this spirit of cooperation been more than wishful thinking, Israel and the US would have realised that globalisation, along with regional stability and peace, requires compromise and understanding. Netanyahu, however, is neither willing to compromise or cooperate.

Similarly, while the participants in the conference seek to assert that Islam is not a threat, a key point has been overlooked by many in the West who fear Islam. It has been Muslims — be they Palestinians, Bosnians or Lebanese — that have been on the receiving end of much of the violence.

Israel, which never tires of drumming up fears of an "Islamic threat", needs to clean up its own house — blaspheming the prophet, tearing up copies of the Qur'an and displaying blatant disrespect for a religious and cultural heritage are not likely to result in anything but bloodshed.

In short, they have stultified all efforts to transform the much acclaimed, and wistful, concept of globalisation into a real world order founded on peace and equality.

And the Muslims... Well, they are unilaterally attempting to prove the West wrong. But is the West listening?

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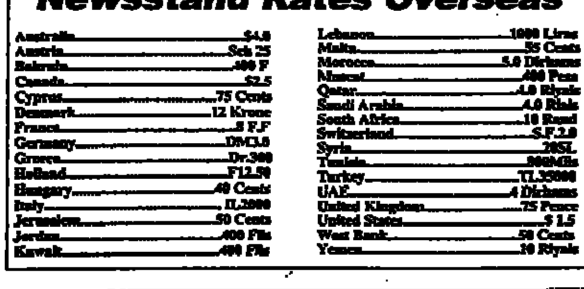
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		Yemen	10 Riyals

Tweaking earmarks

Attempts to reduce levels of American aid to Egypt reveal the partisan nature of some Senate subcommittees, writes Ibrahim Nafie

US-Egyptian relations revolve around an intricate mesh of mutual interests. And while the two countries do not always see eye to eye on every issue, there nevertheless exists a realm of concordance that means relations between them remain viable.

The desire to engineer a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict has brought Egypt and the US closer together over the past two decades. Both countries have a stake in resolving the conflict. Many years ago they realised that the perpetuation of the status quo in the Middle East would bring more harm than good. As a result, the peace process was revived in order to achieve landmark agreements on the Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian tracks.

The Gulf constitutes a second area in which US and Egyptian interests coincide. I need hardly point out the strategic importance of the continued flow of Gulf oil to the US and the West. However, the security of the Gulf is also vital to Egypt. Because of the natural bonds linking Egypt with the Gulf, Egypt's obligations under the Arab League's mutual defence arrangements, and the growing economic interdependency between Egypt and the countries of the Gulf, Egypt, like the US, has worked to staunch the spread of radicalism that emanated from Iran in the 1980s and Iraq in the early 1990s.

Related to these spheres of mutual interests is a third: combating those forces that seek to undermine our interests in these areas. While the Cold War still prevailed, this involved countering Soviet attempts to upset regional stability through its intervention in Afghanistan and its support of the Marxist regime in Ethiopia. With the end of the Cold War, the fight against the forces of international terrorism took precedence.

There remains the realm of joint economic interests. US-Egyptian economic relations have been vital to Egypt which, after years of destructive warfare, had to resume the course of economic development. The country's decaying urban infrastructure, the burdens of over-population and the growing technological gap between Egypt and the West were in desperate need of attention. There can be no disputing the fact that American military and economic aid to Egypt has made a fundamental contribution to overcoming these problems. At the same time, however, the US has benefitted greatly and its relations with Egypt have opened the gateway to the vast markets of the Middle East.

Yet it appears that there are those in Washington who seek to undermine the various spheres of US-Egyptian mutual interests, using the field of economic cooperation as the key. Last month, the US Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Foreign Operations Appropriations removed the earmark on US aid appropriations to Egypt, while sustaining the past earmarks for appropriations to Israel. Lifting this safeguard on the US aid programme to Egypt may mean that the levels of US assistance, which have remained constant for more than 15 years, may drop. Senator Mitch McConnell, the subcommittee's chairman, justified this action on the grounds that Egypt has, among other things, encouraged the Palestinians not to make concessions in the peace negotiations and built closer economic ties with Libya, defying America's efforts to isolate that country.

Fortunately, Senator McConnell's views on Egyptian-American relations do not represent a majority of opinion in the Senate. Both Senator Byrd and Senator Stevens, leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties respectively, opposed the subcommittee's action, protesting that the move was unfair in light of Egypt's key role in pushing forward the Arab-Israeli peace process. As a result of their pleas, the Appropriations Committee has approved Senator Stevens' bill to renew the earmark for Egypt. The bill will be put before the Senate when it meets this month.

In order to comprehend the significance of these developments, some understanding of the workings of US foreign aid appropriations is useful. Earmarking appropriations is a way in which Congress safeguards set levels on the budgets. Many years ago Congress approved the earmarks on the aid appropriations to Israel and Egypt by an overwhelming majority. Indeed, many members referred to both programmes as the "Camp David deal" and considered the earmarks sacrosanct.

This year, the US administration asked Congress for the customary levels of appropriations to Egypt and Israel. However, congressional approval is a lengthy process.

So far the bill is only in its initial phases. However, if it is passed without renewing the earmark for the allocation to Egypt, Congress will in effect be giving the US administration a free hand to set the volume of aid, although this does not necessarily mean that the level will be reduced.

But if Egypt alone has to suffer while the earmark on allocations to Israel is sustained, is it not important for Americans as well as for us to know the origins of this biased action, particularly after so many years of a consistent and balanced policy?

Bold or reckless?

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed explains why he does not agree with the "bold initiative" of the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations on how to overcome the present impasse in the Middle East peace process

A few days ago I received a letter from Henry Siegman, a senior fellow at the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations and coordinator of a report by an independent Task Force, sponsored by the Council, on US Middle East Policy and the Peace Process. Commenting on my article, "Ending the step-by-step", published in the 26 June issue of *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Mr Siegman complained that it was a "total misrepresentation of the Task Force's Report, virtually standing it on its head".

In fact, I also mentioned the Report in my *Al-Ahram Weekly* column on 3 July, which pointed to what I saw as disquieting similarities between some of the procedural aspects of the approach adopted by the Task Force and the ideas reportedly put forward to President Clinton by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu at their last two meetings in Washington. Netanyahu is said to have proposed moving directly to the final stage of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, thus bringing the incremental step-by-step approach to an end and replacing it with a 'package deal' which Arab parties fear will be nothing short of an ultimatum. I never claimed that the Council's stand is identical to Netanyahu's, or to that of think-tanks such as AIPAC (the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee) or IASPS (the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies), which speak for the American Jewish lobby. Members of those groups, some of whom contributed to the Task Force, formed a minority within its ranks which also criticised the findings of the Report, albeit for reasons different to mine.

In his letter to me, Mr Siegman wrote that "the central argument of the Report is that an incremental approach cannot work unless the general goal of Palestinian statehood is accepted by both sides. Absent such an understanding, incremental measures do not build confidence but rather destroy it." The logic of this argument seems to me somewhat faulty. If Netanyahu is calling for bringing the incremental approach to an end, it is not because such an approach runs counter to the goal of Palestinian statehood. After all, he has repeatedly expressed his unequivocal opposition to the very notion of a Palestinian state. If the central argument of the Report is that the step-by-step approach can only work if both parties accept the goal of Palestinian statehood, then it follows that if one of the parties does not accept it the approach cannot work. Thus the main thrust of the Report does more to serve the call to abandon the incremental approach than to encourage Netanyahu's government to adopt the principle of Palestinian statehood.

Moreover, it is not clear exactly what the Report means by Palestinian statehood. The peace-for-land tradeoff is replaced in the Report by another tradeoff: statehood for the Palestinians in exchange for security for Israel. But the Report takes a number of postulates for granted, namely, that security for Israel entails the demilitarisation of the Palestinian state, the subordination of its right to sign agreements with external powers to Israel's security concerns, the stationing of a "minimum necessary contingent of Israeli forces in parts of the Jordan Valley", the annexation of at least 10 per cent of the West Bank to Israel on the grounds that "80 per cent of Israeli settlers reside on 10 per cent of West Bank territories", and that the tradeoff should include "minimal relocation of Israeli populations now living in the territories" (the adjective 'occupied' is significantly absent from the wording of the Report) in exchange for "maximal territorial contiguity for the Palestinian state in the majority of West Bank and Gaza territories". But a state that is stripped of the most basic prerogatives of sovereignty will be a state in nothing but name. In other words, Israel's security will be boosted in exchange for a Palestinian entity deprived of any meaningful sovereign rights.

According to the Report, a minority view in the Task Force takes the tradeoff still further to Israel's advantage, arguing that "the only credible incentive for Israel to accept Palestinian statehood is Palestinian recognition of Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem". The Report states that "any final settlement on Jerusalem must recognise both Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and Al-Quds, whose location and boundaries are to be negotiated by the parties, as the capital of the new Palestinian state." Mortimer Zuckerman and Lester Pollack, both members of the Task Force, have interpreted this statement as an acknowledgment of "Israel's full sovereignty over Jerusalem with the exception of symbolic Muslim sovereignty over the holy sites and symbolic Palestinian sovereignty in an outlying area of Jerusalem such as Abu Dis." Rashid Khalidi, an Arab member of the Task Force, considers the relegation of the Palestinian capital to distant Arab suburbs of Jerusalem "ludicrous and insulting."

Of course, not everything in the Report is negative. Even as it calls for a New Declaration of Principles that it describes as a "bold initiative", the Report is careful to point out that the initiative must not relieve the parties of previous obligations, notably those they have undertaken under the terms of the Oslo Accords: that the Palestinian entity should not be divided into an aggregate of Bantustans but should enjoy "maximal territorial contiguity". The Report also criticises a view that seems to be gaining ascendancy in influential quarters in Washington, which is that America should "disengage" from the conflict since "we cannot want peace more than the parties themselves". But while those recommendations by the Task Force are positive, they can be used to sugar-coat Netanyahu's expected package-deal in order to make it more palatable to the Arab parties. In other words, the Report and, at its heart, the new Declaration of Principles it proposes, are expressions of an ongoing internal debate between representatives of the US foreign policy establishment and the Jewish-American lobby on how best to sell Netanyahu's ultimatum to the Arabs.

In direct contrast to the Jewish-American lobby, a majority in the Task Force recommends closer American involvement, calling on the US to "engage Europe and friendly Arab states, particularly Egypt and Jordan, in the ongoing dialogue." A footnote mentions that several members of the Task Force believe that Jordan in particular should be called upon to play a prominent role. It should be remembered that IASPS, similarly to the Task Force Report, hails King Hussein for showing special determination to help solve problems, while, contrary to the Report, accusing Egypt's foreign policy of being "very unhelpful" (see my 3 July article). In such a context, whatever the shortcomings of the ongoing incremental approach, it still remains a 'lesser evil' than a reckless leap into the unknown. Even if the New Declaration of Principles proposed by the Council on Foreign Relations can help cushion the impact of the leap, it cannot offset the very negative repercussions that any ultimatum by Netanyahu is bound to have on the entire peace process.

Crossing the line

By Naguib Mahfouz

I was deeply shocked by the posters insulting the Prophet Mohamed which Israeli settlers plastered all over Hebron. The Arabs have been in conflict with Israel since 1948, but our conflict has been confined to the political level. We have never stooped to insulting Judaism, and we have always respected other religions.

I am not worried that Arabs and Muslims will respond to this disgusting behaviour in kind. Respect for Judaism and Christianity is an integral part of Islam. No Muslim can insult Jesus and Moses without insulting his own religion. But the immoral behaviour of the Israelis has outraged the whole Islamic world, and marks a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

I hope that the apologies presented by the Israeli president and prime minister are not intended to sweep this matter under the carpet. Such disgraceful acts are in contradiction with the civilised and democratic codes of behaviour which Israel claims to follow.

There are Christian Palestinians as well as Muslims, so one wonders who the next target for insult will be. Where will the extremists on both sides of the border take us? At least Islamists respect the prophets, who are an indivisible part of their faith.

I am horrified at how far Israeli fundamentalism will go in its hostility to Arabs and Muslims.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy

The Press This Week

Wisdom of change

Al-Wafd: "People have waited for long for the cabinet reshuffle but when it came about they were disappointed. There was a lot of talk about differences between ministers and the lack of cooperation between them. When the change came about it was a far cry from what was expected. We thought that a new cabinet would rectify the faults of the previous government but this was not to be. Egypt has many problems, foremost among them are the worsening economic conditions, unemployment and the rise in the cost of living. We imagined that the change would bring about solutions to these problems, but this did not happen."
(Editorial, 9 July)

Al-Shaab: "What everyone has noticed is that the recent cabinet reshuffle was very limited. Ministers whose policies were unpopular and who were suspected of wrongdoing kept their posts as though the government was sticking its tongue out at the public. Worse still, the cabinet reshuffle was preceded by deceit and by the usual denials that a reshuffle was imminent."
(Talaat Romeih, 11 July)

Al-Ahram: "Firebrands would not understand the meaning or importance of political stability. Stability does not mean that everything should remain unchanged but that change should be well-guided and that the essential elements in the system should be kept intact so long as they have a political and social function to achieve... Over the past two decades, the widespread social and political changes on the Egyptian scene took place without any violent shake-ups. It all came about peacefully and quietly — proof of the importance of Egypt's political stability. These great changes and the country's marked stability are the result of the way Egypt was governed under Mubarak. The government's philosophy is that change should emanate from the need for change and for greater efficiency and efficacy, not from a mere urge for change."
(Editorial, 12 July)

Al-Usboue: "It is no exaggeration to state that the recent cabinet reshuffle was a shock to the Egyptian public. The hopes for an 'appropriate change' were dashed by the mere 'patch up' job that the reshuffle really entailed. The media hype, before and after the reshuffle, contrasts with the modesty of the change. The public is shocked by the apparent 'stagnation and inaction' which are becoming constant features of life in this country. Hopes were dashed when those ministers who were expected to be removed stayed in office, despite their poor performance and despite official reports questioning their probity.."
(Mahmoud Bakry, 14 July)

Rose El-Youssef: "The recent cabinet reshuffle dashed the hopes of those individuals who had hoped to be included in the new cabinet. Political observers who were looking forward to a change in faces and policies in key ministries and major positions were dismayed. The ministerial change has failed to satisfy the public. As matter of fact, there has been no radical change since Mubarak took office in 1981. None of the cabinet changes effected so far has brought about real change and none has met the public demand for change... Change means a change in policies and there is no indication of this happening at the present."
(Mahmoud El-Tohami, 14 July)

Al-Arabi: "Until the recent reshuffle, we had sympathised with Dr El-Ganzouri for having to lead a cabinet whose members he never selected. We know it is difficult for a prime minister to lead a cabinet that he has not picked out himself. We, therefore, expected him to choose his team carefully. We expected a new government which can cope with the farmers' problems, confront Zionism, reject US arrogance, end corruption, punish exploiters, and allow law-abiding businessmen to make honest profit. If this is accomplished, it will no longer matter who the ministers are."
(Editorial, 14 July)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



For the time being, the features of the new Turkish premier, Mesut Yilmaz, are coloured by the flush of success and shaped by the impact of his unexpected victory. These circumstances have permeated the rather blunt contours of his face: thick eyebrows, slightly globulous eyes, a hint of jowl and abundant, glossy hair. The strong lines of his tie and the emphatic arm, raised in a triumphant salute, complete a picture of optimism.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Balancing act

In trying to attain a measure of political and economic stability in the drive toward democratic development, nations have to face stiff opposition. The chief factor in securing this stability is the identification of those benefits which accrue to the people as a result of democratisation policies.

Not all countries begin their ascent from the same spot — this varies very considerably from nation to nation. Some start by trying to satisfy their basic requirements, such as food, potable water, or housing, while others may begin by improving the population's general standard of living.

Regardless of the original point of departure, however, protection of the environment remains an essential requirement for securing the stability that guarantees development and the progress of democracy. It can sometimes be extremely difficult for politicians and businessmen in developing countries to appreciate the importance of the environment. The experiences of the industrialised nations which have made great strides in democracy have proved that the preservation of the environment has a preponderant effect on the level of society and the economy of any nation.

Damage to the environment which affects water and soil can have very adverse effects on food supplies and water resources and, hence, on public health and levels of production.

Pollution diverts and squanders capital. The depletion or mismanagement of natural resources leads in the long run to the dispersal and exhaustion of these resources.

The increased global demand for goods produced in environmentally sound conditions has imposed stringent restrictions on production methods. Investors in new projects related to infrastructure or privatisation now have to take environmental conditions into consideration.

It is to be expected that, in these conditions, investors are concerned with backing and supporting environmental preservation policies. Numerous examples indicate that developing nations and new democracies can achieve rapid economic growth without sacrificing the environment. The illusion that contradictions are inevitable between environmental needs and economic development, since preserving the environment raises production costs and delays projects, is just that: an illusion. In a number of Latin American nations, it was found that careful planning can achieve the balance needed between economic and environmental targets, and that taking into consideration the social dimensions of development, such as environmental awareness, traffic problems, and waste disposal, improved production and less pollution for the greater good of society. This is a lesson Eastern European countries such as Poland, which were exposed to industrial pollution during the Communist bloc's drive to develop economically, are beginning to learn the hard way.

In this context, we must take into consideration realistic rates of progress and the economic conditions necessary to achieve gradual development in light of the environmental impact of industrial projects.

If we, in Egypt, can follow these general rules and learn from the experience of nations that have learned from their mistakes, we will not have to repeat their errors, especially those related to infrastructure, tourism projects and industrial expansion in new privatisation programmes.



Soapbox

Shuffle and deal

Although the most recent changes to Prime Minister El-Ganzouri's cabinet were limited to the departure of three ministers, the entry of three new ministers (including two women) and the re-shuffling of four ministers, the changes served to bring about certain well-defined goals.

First, the previous ministers of the economy, social affairs and insurance, and scientific research were dismissed because their performance was under par, while their ministries are vital for the implementation of state policy as outlined in *Egypt in the 21st Century*, the plan drawn up by El-Ganzouri. Other ministers such as Atef Ebeid were relieved of excess responsibilities, with a view to improving the efficiency of their performance. To guarantee the proper functioning of the various ministries, some new elements were brought into the cabinet.

The Egyptian public had expected greater changes, including the removal of certain ministers who have held their positions for as long as 18 years. The criterion for remaining was the performance of the ministers rather than the duration of their tenure, however.

The reshuffle, furthermore, will enable El-Ganzouri to lead the government in accordance with his philosophy.

Egyptians believe that El-Ganzouri seeks to be remembered as the strong prime minister who implemented Mubarak's project for rebuilding Egypt. I am certain that the new government will make substantial achievements, and that we will not have to wait long to see them materialise.



This week's Soapbox speaker is chairman of the board at Dar El-Ma'aref and editor in chief of October *magazine.*

Ragab El-Banna

Turning to the East — again

Jubilation in Hong Kong has thrown the Western defence and high finance establishment into disarray. The handover, writes Anouar Abdel-Malik, signals a return to nationalism and, more importantly, the beginning of a new dawn. The sun no longer rises in the West

The hands of the clock turn, and turn again. Several weeks ago, at the end of May — only a month after the "strategic partnership" between China and Russia was declared in Moscow on 23 April — the *People's Daily* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party and the paper with the highest circulation rates in China, featured an editorial by Chinese President and Party Chief Jiang Zemin, saying: "We must focus on strengthening the national spirit."

The national spirit? What can this archaic concept mean in the age of market supremacy and the end of ideology, in our "global village?" Have the clocks begun to turn back since Hong Kong was handed back to China?

The enthusiasm in Hong Kong among the construction moguls, electronics millionaires, shipping magnates and bankers rushing to invest in China equals, if not exceeds, the enthusiasm among the ordinary people. There is no controversy over this point. Yet the advocates of the West in our besieged world are counting the hours and the days until the enemies of the People's Republic of China launch a new crusade in the name of the "democracy", "discovered" by Great Britain during its last two years of control over the island. This is why the name Martin Lee is reiterated day after day in the Western press and echoed in a few Arabic newspapers, as though it was a magic incantation capable of bringing about Hong Kong's deliverance. Deliverance, here, of course, means provoking Hong Kong's new authorities into banning demonstrations and introducing repressive measures in the event that the advocates of democracy attempt to attack the symbols and institutions of the state.

What is the source of the rancour that has infected the global mafia and, above all, the Zionist thought and action that dominates the Western media? Why do the West's major columnists, most of whom ardently support the racist Zionist state, feel they have to bare their fangs at a process taking place on the other side of the globe?

The return of Hong Kong to the mother nation, to the joy of the public as well as powerful businessmen and politicians in Hong Kong, signals a return to nationalism as the primary determinant in domestic and international politics. The event runs against the grand lie promoted by the advocates of the unipolar world order revolving around the Zionist-American axis, the masterminds who trumpeted the concept of the global village — which the centre manages by remote control through the agents of Western acculturation in our midst.

Here we must come to terms with an ambiguous logic. The national liberation front and the fight against colonialism have revolved around two predominant orientations. The first was made up of pro-nationalists, embodied by the United National Front, for whom the "nation" prevailed in political discourse and action. The second consisted of those who believed that the downtrodden popular sectors, notably the working classes, should be the vanguard upon which the battle for liberation would be based.

In spite of the momentous events of the '40s, the advocates of class struggle did not fully comprehend the implications of the liberation of China, the founding of the People's Republic and the rebirth of the Chinese liberation army as the National Liberation Army. These events were indelibly etched in the constitution of the People's Republic of China and the ruling Chinese Communist Party. The advocates of the second orientation believed that 1 October 1949 represented the victory of the working class, the establishment of communist rule and the triumph of the socialist system in China, whereas, in fact, it represented the first, ground-breaking phase of a nationalist enterprise. In other words, full national independence was brought about by a broad-based national popular front, led by a Marxist-Leninist communist party which derived its ideology from contemporary socialist thought combined with the ideology of Mao Tse Tung, heir to Confucian and Taoist philosophy. The ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, therefore, has roots firmly planted in the essence of Chinese civilisation.

Many advocates of the second orientation also failed to appreciate the significance of the victory won by the progressive nationalist forces in the Cuban Revolution in 1959, or the accession to leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party after a 25-year-long war of liberation and the unification of Vietnam in 1974. Meanwhile, the Popular Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea) has remained beyond the focus of analysis.

No sooner had the Soviet Union disintegrated from within and the European socialist camp dissolved than the opinions of both the conservative, right-wing forces and the Westernised segment of the left converged to proclaim the end of socialism and the need to be rational and realistic. With "the end of history", they said, the only history left is that of the capitalist market, although some old-hat socialists contend that this market provides sufficient guarantees for the working class. As for the banners of liberation and socialism that continue to flutter over approximately 40 per cent of the world's population — China — they are an anomaly, they say, a cast-back to the ancient world of idol worship.

For some advocates of this trend, the return to power of democratic socialist parties, right-wing socialist parties, and sometimes progressive nationalist parties in western and eastern Europe offers grounds for optimism. This is the "acceptable" side of socialism. It has been reconstituted and restored to the fold of the new world — the world of the rational market — at a safe remove from revolutions and liberation. Now everything is running smoothly: nothing even remotely threatens the international balance of power, the US-Zionist global order which confers franchises backed by seals of approval, awards and enticements.

The slogan "one nation, two systems", epitomising the restoration of Hong Kong to its mother nation, however, has rocked the boat. Moreover, it coincides with a number of other developments which ruffle the tranquility and complacency of the champions of Zionist-American globalisation.

First, North Korea has decided to hasten talks over unity with South Korea. The talks, in which both the US and China are participating, are now gaining such momentum that South Korea is uncertain of its fate. Unity, with its exorbitant financial, political and strategic costs, looms.

Second, India and Pakistan have entered amicable negotiations over normalising relations. It now appears likely that they will peaceably resolve the problem of Kashmir, which has sparked numerous tensions and two wars between the countries since the '60s. Kashmir may soon attain a form of independence or a high level of autonomy and serve to catapult a confederation among the nations of the Indian subcontinent, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. India will then be in a position to become an active and effective participant in the new sphere of globalisation centring around the Sino-Russian axis, side by side with Japan and the central Islamic sphere made up of Iran and the Arab world.

Third, there is a growing trend among the Islamic republics of Central Asia to coalesce and seek closer relations with neighbouring Islamic nations: Iran above all, Turkey under Erbakan, and Pakistan. Given the lack of sufficiently distinct cultural factors to promote national unity within these countries in light of the presence of large minority communities (notably Russians), they are beginning to sense that closer bonds with the neighbouring countries on the basis of shared cultural and historic values are the best means of encouraging unity among themselves.

Fourth, following the victory of President Kabila in the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is a growing trend toward unity among most of the powerful and wealthy countries surrounding the large lakes of equatorial Africa, creating a sphere that will include Uganda, the Congo, and other countries along the Atlantic coast. At the same time, this central African sphere is moving closer to the sphere of Southern Africa led by Mandela.

Fifth, with the inclusion of Laos and Vietnam in ASEAN, and the acceptance of Miyanmar (formerly Burma) and Cambodia in principle, the influence of these rising economic powers has expanded considerably. These countries are seeking to overcome obstacles and contradictions in order to generate a circle of influence as powerful as that of Japan and Korea to the north, providing a southern axis to the Chinese sphere which will serve as the pivotal point of the new order of globalisation.

Sixth, the coming together of European countries is proceeding with stops and starts, but it has not floundered, and, provoked by American arrogance, Europeans cling to the process of unification, which nevertheless remains elusive and fraught with pitfalls.

Seventh, in Latin America, and particularly South America, the sphere of Mercosur, combining Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, has now come to include Chile. In addition, features of a new sphere in the Caribbean, centring around Venezuela and including Cuba, are beginning to emerge.

The important regional groupings outlined above, however, will remain beyond our grasp as long as we remain out of touch with the world, preoccupied with a "process" that is doomed to failure. Above, I have outlined two major schools of thought and action in our Egyptian and Arab national movement and the world of the South in general. These two orientations, regardless of the differences and contradictions between them, have worked hand in hand, with persistence, in order to attain the goal of independence and enter the phase of development and social revolution. In other words, the incongruity has never led to the disintegration of the united national front.

At the same time, a small nucleus with a strident voice and enormous capabilities stands opposed to the various forces of the united national front and, in the name of "the revolution," declares that the enemy is the nation, that nationalism is the obstacle to progress and that the national movement is a figment of the imagination, a hallucination.

What solution do they offer? An end to nationalism and the declaration of the international revolution in the name of the ideology of cosmopolitanism. The nations that gained independence through the wave of national liberation movements, as well as the independent nations that have achieved a broad range of the goals of their social revolutions, nations such as China, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, and (for a while) Angola and Mozambique, which were led by communist parties, have come to represent the epitome of heresy. They are now the true enemy.

While the British press sounds the clarion call to realism and stability and the American-Zionist press vents its furor, the majority of the Arab press has celebrated the victory of nationalism as embodied by the return of Hong Kong to its mother nation. One nevertheless hears a few shrill voices in the Arab world that seem bent on outdoing the conservatives in the West in their condemnation of the event. Some rival even the most vicious commentators from the Zionist camp. How else can one comprehend some of the alien expressions and curious turns of phrase that have crept into the editorials of some of the wealthiest Arabic newspapers? How else can one understand that tone of mourning in a handful of articles in the Arab press over a lost remnant of colonialism? The doleful appeals, in the name of democracy and on behalf of the forsaken inhabitants of Hong Kong, seem to make no sense. The entrance of the Chinese popular liberation army into Hong Kong has infuriated them. A Chinese regiment of 4,500 men has taken the place of the British occupation force, which numbered 10,000. What a disaster! Would it not have been more appropriate for the Chinese to send in a troop of boy scouts, or perhaps their national ballet company, in order to fill the gap left by the departure of two British regiments?

And what about the "gap" in intelligence and espionage? Can chaos be averted? "Professor" Gerald Segal, currently head of the British Asia-Pacific Programme, from the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London and a veteran Zionist, addresses the "tragedy" of Hong Kong from the perspective of intelligence and espionage. The Chinese authorities, he claims, are set to expel all electronic surveillance systems and Western intelligence personnel (read spies). In Hong Kong, China will learn how to enhance its strategic advantages in its long-standing rivalry with the US. China, via Hong Kong, will catch up with the US in warfare and military intelligence. Hong Kong will serve as a smoke screen to import the technology that will ultimately serve military aims. (*Herald Tribune*, 25 June 1997)

A Western businessman in Hong Kong gave an amusing response. In the letters to the editor section of the following day's *Tribune*, the businessman expressed the opinion that numerous countries, including the People's Republic of China, have used Hong Kong as a base for intelligence gathering and a window for spying on the Western world since the '50s, to the extent that, in the '60s, the Western counter-intelligence agencies in Hong Kong made up a joke that went: 'If one more electronic bug is planted in Hong Kong, the island will sink!'

The island may yet sink under the weight of the equipment installed by Western intelligence agencies, led by the countries of the NATO alliance. These are in throes of a panic attack these days, as though handing over Hong Kong was an unexpected catastrophe. What can be done? How can they discourage the millionaires of Hong Kong who have rallied around the new Chinese governor? Can they stop millions of dollars of Chinese investment from pouring in? How can they stop the sky-rocketing stock market prices that reflect the general state of jubilation? How can things be brought under control?

Why, they demand, has the Communist Party not stepped forward to restore order? Every day, the US media call upon the Chinese Communist Party, still legally banned in Hong Kong, to exercise its full authorities and put an end to a chaos which "threatens" the fate of socialism. Everything has gone topsy-turvy. Simple folk like myself thought communism had ended and capitalism now reins supreme. Why are the Zionist lobby, the US strategists and their colleagues so angered by this new emergence of capitalism?

Could it be that the slogan "One nation, two systems" is so disturbing? Perhaps it has ramifications that extend beyond Hong Kong, beyond the reunification of a people which the artificial borders drawn by Western colonial powers in the 19th century had kept apart. These ramifications may even threaten the current international balance of power. They could inspire a wave of unification within the various cultural spheres, especially within the Arab nation and the surrounding Islamic sphere of civilisation, to counter the hegemony, racism and rule of contempt epitomised by the much vaunted "global village." Perhaps the notion of synthesising globalism and particularism offers a new, realistic framework for a new world order, focused on the resurgence and unification of the peoples of the East? The return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty not only marks the end of the age of Western imperialism in Asia, it has opened the door to a new, brighter and more challenging future that inspires us to hope and action.

"Let us move forward relentlessly..." Signs of this may already be visible. As the clouds gather ominously over the Atlantic and begin to roll eastward, Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia — the heart of the Arab nation — are establishing links and looking toward revolutionary Iran. After years of hostility, we can once again envision the prospect of a solid bond linking us with the renaissance of Asia. Who said we have no appointment with destiny?

To The Editor

Visit postponed

Sir- I welcomed the opportunity to read *Al-Ahram Weekly* when I bought a copy in the old city of Jerusalem during a visit to Israel. I was particularly interested to see whether there was a more honest approach to Israel. Unfortunately I was disappointed, and it is clear that Egyptians or the powers that be in Egypt are still more interested in playing politics than dealing with the realities on the ground. This notwithstanding the very substantial benefits that Egypt has obtained by signing the peace treaty with Israel.

Your article "A peace that might have been" is full of the same anti-Israel lies and rhetoric of the Nasser era. If you want to judge Israel then do so on an equitable basis. Concern yourself with torture of Palestinians by Palestinians and the system of justice in Egypt before judging Israel.

If the only way you can define yourselves as Egyptians is by unwarranted hatred of Israel and using Israel as a convenient scapegoat for your own problems, then you have learned nothing from the past.

I look forward to a time when this attitude will change and Egypt will reap the full benefit of a true and warm peace.

I will postpone visiting Egypt until that day arrives.

Ben Friedman
e-mail: benf@iafrica.com

An arm and a leg

Sir- I regularly buy your newspaper, though not every week as will become clear, here in Cape Town. But it costs an arm and a leg at 10 rands (equivalent to about LE10). At 75p in Egypt it would be far cheaper to get Egyptian friends to mail me copies even if I should pay the mailing costs and pay them for the effort.

I can't understand why the paper should cost so much in South Africa; I notice that it would be cheaper to buy it in the US.

I can't contemplate an annual subscription (at $150 per year). Again this is much higher than any American or European weekly newspaper or magazine. For your African and South readers you should definitely have a much more accessible price and subscription rate.

Shamil Jeppie
University of Cape Town
Western Cape
South Africa

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Just hanging around

David Blake bumps into Abdel-Wahab hurrying off to an assignation

Arabic takht*: The Arabic Ensemble and the National Arabic Music Ensemble; Cairo Opera House, Open Air Centre; 10 July*



Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, a man with many appointments

Do you like it, the *takht*, or not? Some prefer the folkloric. The *takht* is classical Egyptian — Abdel-Wahab, etc. The folkloric is straight from the farm and the people: pure, neither classic nor simple.

The classics, whether Egyptian or US-Euro, are under pressure to change their image before it fades away. Twist the classics around a bit so that they come out differently is one rescue device. There were no twists to this concert, so everything came out as usual — strictly square, on the level, with no surprises. The music of the Abdel-Wahab era produced some wonderful songs dripping with nostalgia, silent cinema music, Laila Mourad tangoing through the gloaming of the spaces of the old Semiramis ballroom.

The paint job on this type of music is wearing thin. The future will have its own say about the old, high, bad old days. Folkloric music is neither high nor bad nor old; it seems as new as the farms themselves: far out, distinctive, noisy and confident, with the sounds of Stravinsky and Schoenberg as family relations. During the rest of the month, hopefully into August, in the great outdoors of the Opera, there will be samples of both types of Egyptian music.

Tonight, no folk sounds and little of the boozy-bouncy last days of empire from the classic corner. Instead, an orchestral piece by Abdel-Wahab called *Khatwit Habibi* (My lover's footsteps). Loved by the large audience as it opened the concert, it was a mix of presentations and themes and hesitations, almost as if the composer dreaded an open confrontation with *the results of his musical thought.* The obvious facing up to the resulting melody seemed to throw him. This style of writing has its virtues: he seemed always in a hurry, no time to stop, no time to contemplate, we're late, so on to the next appointment, hurry up or she'll have left. He seems to have missed his great musical opportunity to have become a wonderfully expressive film composer. Then — *perforce no doubt* as he must have felt this agitation in his writing, he brings out the melody. It is always splendid, original and strongly felt. This was Abdel-Wahab and the public are right to stick with him. So much of the music otherwise is shadowy tangos and last waltzes, but always the reluctant lover dashes off to another target, to a beautiful melody.

Abdel-Wahab's *music* seems balanced on the razor's edge. It has drama and mood. He may have missed the cinematic chase but not the time. These late last minute meetings were successful enough, and then the gift he had ran into the art of Umm Kulthum. Together they produced a flame.

After this Abdel-Wahab film ending we ran into a male singer, Mohamed El-Shami, who sang *Kul Marra Lamma Aweidak* (Every time I promise you), composed by Sayed Makkawi. It was short and quite cheerful. The singer seems to have no regrets. These love songs occupy the same area as Gershwin without *Porgy* or Cole Porter *without Manhattan*. But they are hardly touched by jazz or the blues, and require limited dramatic development. One more view of the Abdel-Wahab situation.

After a voice, an *oud*. The *oud* is Egypt's most beautiful instrument. It goes everywhere, from salon to desert and, like a violin, it belongs intimately with the player. He can take *it anywhere. The oud is a troubadour's* instrument. Why don't women play it? If they do, where are they? The harp is almost a female prerogative, so why not the strings of the lute? It goes with an orchestra but has no powers of immediate domination like the harp, and it belongs on the intimate earth, not like the harp in heaven.

Tonight's player, Sayed Mansour, *had no trouble with its many difficulties*. His strong, independent fingers produced powerful sonority. When he began a type of improvisational music he had the sound of a cello backing him. It was effective to throw his own tone into prominence. Then came some other sounds from the orchestra, but there was no need to look for him— he stayed out front. The music went through various effects: softly floating ones loved by the *oud*, long melodic ones loved a little less but played with great authority by Mansour. He took us on a tour of the instrument's possibilities. After this was a short pause, then began quite another thing. *Oud* sound is *not guitar sound, but Mansour began* to play imposing melodies decorated with virtuoso display and he drew from his instrument deep, rich, dark bass tones not often heard from *ouds*: Then came more exciting, smoky guitar noises, powerful and erotic. We moved in another space — flamenco. The chords thrust themselves into the spaces of the open air theatre; no noise from planes overhead *could compete. The key went dra*matically major as the player almost struck the instrument as flamenco players do their guitars. We were off into the dance. Rhythms flew. The show resonated into a steamy, vibrant display of repeated chords ending in *arpeggios* increasing in power to a *fortissimo* explosion. *Olé.* We were in the caves of Andalusia.

Another male singer, Raafat Youss*ri, sang a song by Sayed Makkawi* called *Issaal Marra Allayia* (Ask sometime about me) with light but appealing tone. Then Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar sang a song by Mounir Mourad, *Baamur El-Hubb* (I order love). This was evocative, with a lovely melody, the singer dark-voiced and cello-like. It was originally written for Abdel-Halim Hafez — sad, brave, nostalgic. This song did not let the original down, but caught its memory.

A lady at last. Nehad Fathallah in the song *Arooh Lemeen?* (To whom do I turn?) written for Umm Kulthum by Riyad El-Sunbati. This struck like the original rendering. Fathallah was *brightly piercing — a war cry. She is* small of physique, but she packs a vocal wallop of power. The audience adored her.

After the intermission there was an orchestral interlude of the *nahawand* type written by Abdel-Meniem El-Hariri. Then a song about fortune tellers, composed by Mohamed Fawzi and sung by Abeer Adam. Then a long song for violin, with solo violin*ist Hazem Ibrahim, transposed from* a song *Siret El-Hubb* (The mention of love) by Umm Kulthum.

The show ended with a flute solo *Fein Tariaak?* (Which way do you go?), one of Abdel-Wahab's high romances. And then Reham Abdel-Hakim with *Hubb Eih*? (What kind of love do you mean?) composed for Umm Kulthum by Baligh Hamdi.

The ending of the concert was fine, a *distillation of the art pop atmosphere*. Call it what you wish, at its best it is effective and the crowd love it, joining it and conducting it personally.

But there is something sad and mysterious about it. Do not accept, however friendly the offer, the key to these legends' houses. If you do, in the interests of a midnight call for help, you will open the door and go in to find no one there. They have left — like Abdel-Wahab — on a hurried mission to somewhere else.

Art

Painting for people

Nigel Ryan finds far more than left-overs in the first of the summer group shows

If there is a marked dearth of new exhibitions during the summer months one of the more pleasant aspects of the season is the crop of retrospective shows as various galleries attempt what is, so the more cynically-minded might think, the fine art equivalent of an end of season stock-clearance. Such a characterisation, though, is less than fair, since these collective exhibitions, comprising a selection of works — admittedly unsold— that have already been shown by artists in various solo shows afford visitors an opportunity to recap, if they are assiduous gallery goers, on what they have already seen or, perhaps more realistically, to catch up on at least some of the exhibitions they missed first time round.

Among the first of the annual group shows to open is that hosted by Espace. A modest exhibition, comprising works by ten artists from the gallery's stable, it avoids the obvious temptation to overcrowd with the result that, in the absence of clutter, it becomes possible to actually see the objects on display.

As the twentieth century splutters to a close surprise to say that, despite all predictions to the contrary, painting is alive and well, at least in Cairo. Perhaps this is simply a function of the market — the infrastructures necessary to allow a departure from the discrete, portable art object simply do not exist, either here or in the majority of other Third World capitals. The conditions that allow the selection panel of the Turner Prize to ignore paint in favour of more 'relevant' or 'contemporary' media are hardly applicable to the rest of the world — i.e. the world outside the powerful metropolises. And despite the self-inflating hyperbole of globalisation, the switched on, on-line, sound-bite, digitalised culture that seems itself to consist of little more than a video clip cannibalising the technology of which it is the product, there is as yet no need for those who paint to apologise for the reactionary nature of their medium. Geography, I'm afraid, is imbued with its own logic, and artists need to eat. And since no institutions exist in Egypt that will commission them to fill rooms with crude oil and then pay for the rights to reproduce the installation, they are left with the task of producing objects that private rather than institutional patrons might buy. And this means, more often than not, something to hang on the wall. One can lament this situation as vociferously as one likes, but it remains a fact. And I, for one, happen to *quite like painting*.

The exhibition at Espace holds few surprises, though one of the more interesting aspects of the show is the virtual absence of abstract pieces. The closest we get to pure abstraction are two pieces by Hussein Sharif, a Sudanese painter who has been exhibiting in Cairo now for several years. Yet even here, with these elegantly modulated mauve, turquoise and aquamarine compositions whose areas of colour resolve into a kind of tartan orphism, there appear to be residual elements of landscapes, not least in the texture of the surfaces. The process is much more obvious in the two paintings by Hassan Ahmed hanging opposite. At first glance these virulently coloured canvases, with slightly raised swirling lines of black look like a slightly belated attempt to mediate between colour field and drip painting, a kind of synthesis of New York expressionism. But no, look for a few seconds longer and figures emerge from the violent reds, unclear, mysterious, but no less there.

For the rest of the exhibitors, a more straightforward approach to the figurative serves both to il*luminate and obscure* meanings. Sherif Abdel-Badie contributes simplified, schematised, bright little folksy scenes appallingly framed on badly made linen mounts. The largest of the three pieces, thankfully unmounted, features two figures reclining in a bower-cum-seat, surmounted by a dowdy, dun brown peacock. Other figures mill around. While such painting does little else but scream for a narrative, when it comes to what any one of the inhabitants of this ochre, green and blue world is doing, your guess is as good as mine. I don't know, and I'm afraid I don't really care.

The series of paintings by Assem Sharaf could well depict one of the *outer circles of* hell. Not that there is anything refined about the horrors on show. These are archetypal neuroses, sexually charged groupings in which human figures crawl on all fours, and seemingly calm nudes are somehow disjointed and dragged away by unpleasant looking imps. The problem, of course, is that in all these paintings no one seems to mind very much what is being done. Yet the sometimes swooning expressions reinforce the unsettling aspect of it all, and I was reminded of a peculiar 15th mural in Verona, yet another vision of hell, but one whose *pre-Freudian inhabits* have carrots inserted into their bottoms by de-sexed devils.

Dina El-Ghareib's two col*lage pieces are scraps in* search of signification, though the tearing and gluing, and the cutting of one picture to dissect a written text, simply reinforce the equivocal, muted colour schemes of the painted portions. These are the cheapest things in the exhibition, and, by making a virtue of equivocation, among the most direct.

Omar El-Fayoumi exhibits a number of accomplished set-pieces, street scenes that mingle curiously with interiors, a technique that provides open access to the beds in corners on which female figures languish. The reclining nudes are adaptations of Western models, with more than a hint of Va*lazquez*. Nor are they the only incongruous element. In one painting a flying turtle seems to cross the street. Yet throughout it all, people sit quietly, smoking their *shishas*, drinking their coffee. Only one figure *attempts* to catch the attention of the viewer. He looks distraught, and might be happier surfing the net. The rest are blissfully unaware that they are occupying a reactionary space, constructed by a reactionary medium.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Adel Thabet (Oils & Pastels)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, corner of Mohamed Mahmoud St, Borg El-Attebba', Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-10pm. Until 17 July.
Forty-five works displayed under the title "From Cairo to the Beaches".

Escalon
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 7942. Open throughout the day. Until 17 July.
Works under the title Faces of The World.

Art for All
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 31 July.
Works by Mohamed El-Nagdi, Abu Bakr El-Nawawi, Galal El-Hosseiny, Gihan Raouf and others, celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohamed.

Hamdi Ateya (Paintings)
Hotel Sofitel, Hurghada. Tel 065/442261. Daily until 31 July.

Ebada El-Zebeiry (Works in ink)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily noon-10pm. 20 July-4 August.

Mounir Banoub
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm. Until the end of the month.
Works under the title Between Egypt and Canada.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Sept.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept.
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassaan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawy, Hisham El-Zeiny, Hussein Sharif, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, all of whom held exhibitions at the gallery during the last season.



Farouq Wagdi at Salama Gallery

Summer Collection
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Fri, 10.30am-2pm. & 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by Taheya Halim, Abdel-Wahab Morsi, Salem Salah, George Bahgoury, Hassan Abdel-Fattah, among others.

Group Exhibition
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until 30 Sept.
Works by over 20 artists, including George Bahgouri, Mohamed Abla, Salah Hassouna, Xavier Puigmarti, Esmat Dawistashi and Aziz El-Hihi.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, instrument ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Indian Films
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162.
17 July, 4.30pm: Sharabi
21 July, 4.30pm: Akela
23 July, 4.30pm: White Elephant

Indian Cultural Festival for Children
The latest Indian films for children, clay modelling, floor designs, kite making, yoga, Hindustani music, exhibitions, books, documentaries, dolls, and more at the Integrated Care Society, Heliopolis. Until August. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243/ 392 5162/ 3927573.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Ransom
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

With Mel Gibson.

Liar Liar
El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. With Jim Carrey.

The English Patient
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Willem Dafoe and Juliette Binoche in the 9 Oscar awards-winning hit.

Sleepers
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Brad Pitt and Kevin Bacon.

The Preacher's Wife
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Whitney Houston.

Dante's Peak
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & Thur-Sat, midnight. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Pierce Brosnan and Linda Hamilton.

Mars Attacks
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
With Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close and Danny De Vito.

Romeo and Juliet
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Quite an impressive adaptation of William Shakespeare's dramatic language to a very contemporary setting, replete with black leather jackets and neon lights.

Last Dance
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Sharon Stone.

Hazzamni Ya...
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
Fifi Abdu's play filmed and screened.

Teffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Leila Elwi and Maguid El-Masri.

Kish El-Ghorab (Mushroom)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Youssra.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Adel Imam and Sherine.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 17 July, 9pm.
The ensemble performs selections from the classical repertoire in the manner of a traditional *takht*.

Circus Show
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 18 July, 8pm.

Nubian Evening
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 19 July, 9pm.
Music and songs by Karam Morad.

Folkloric Dances and Music
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 21 July, 9pm.

THEATRE

Toqous El-Esharat Wel-Tahawolat (Rites of Signs and Tranformations)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 17-23 July, 9pm.
Scripted by Saadallah Wanis, directed by Hassan El-Wair, starring Nabil El-Halafawi, Sawsan Badr and Hamdi El-Wazir.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 10.30pm.
With Hala Sedqi, Farouq El-Feshawi and Ezzat El-Alayli; directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Wed & Thur 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhy.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Sat & Sun, 10pm, Mon 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhy and starring all the family members of the televised series.

Bahlool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm.
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Leilat Guevara (Guevara's Night)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8pm.
With Khalil Morsi, Manal Zaki and Khaled El-Essawi; directed by Assem Nagati.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

El-Mahzala (The Disgrace)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.
With Sherine, Omar El-Hariri and Tarek El-Dessouqi; directed by Shaker Ebdel-Latif.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

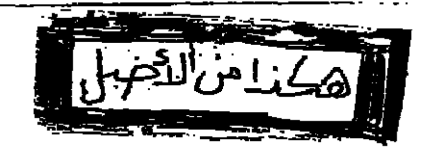
Around the galleries

EXHIBITIONS become fewer and fewer as summer drags on in Cairo. This paucity of things new, perhaps, is a blessing in disguise. One can take time out and go see a favourite painting in one of Cairo's numerous permanent collections. The Stockmarket (1945) by Marguerite Nakhla, housed in the Museum of Modern Art, is certainly worth the trip to the Opera House grounds. At once witty and formally sophisticated, it brilliantly, in an almost Bosch-like manner, captures the grotesqueries of the world of Mammon.

Marguerite Nakhla

The Atelier du Caire plays host to over 20 works in a variety of media and techniques by **Latifa Youssef**. Although these are mostly abstract, the use of materials extraneous to the picture plane (collage) and the application of paint by knife give the illusion of ghosts inhabiting the canvas — the ghosts, or residue, of the figurative.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri



More than a soap bubble

THE OPENING of the third Radio and Television Festival on 12 July in the Cheops Hall of the Cairo International Conference Centre might be said to have marked the coming of age of the event, reports **Hanan Sabra**.

From its modest beginnings, this year's festival has attracted 20 Arab countries, competing for some LE300,000 worth of prizes, as well as the honour of winning the gold, silver and bronze sectional awards. And competition this year is stiffer than ever, with the juries having to sift through 273 television and 160 radio programmes.

Hamdy El-Konaisy, secretary-general of the festival, is predictably pleased with the festival's expansion in recent years. The number of soap operas entered this year, he reports, "has quadrupled, while all other sections have shown less dramatic but significant increases in the number of entries." The value of prizes at the disposal of the festival has seen a similar, exponential increase, multiplying more than ten-fold since last year.

In a move that signals the organisers' ambitions to transform the festival into an international trade event in addition to providing a showcase for regional productions, a major exhibition, which has attracted 145 companies from around the world, is being staged for the first time. On show is the latest technological equipment in cable and satellite broadcasting, alongside representatives from major distributing companies.

The avowed aim of the exhibition is to facilitate enhanced inter-Arab cooperation across all fields of broadcasting, both in terms of production and transmission. The emphasis on cooperation was underlined by remarks at the opening ceremony made by Safwat El-Sherif, minister of information, who appealed for greater cooperation between Arab film producers.

Opening ceremonies continued with a performance, *Shababik El-Nour* (Light Windows), presented by Mohamed El-Helw and Mona Abdel-Ghani. The festival closes tomorrow.



photo: Aref Saadeddin

Storm in a teacup

That the National Theatre Conference had been in the planning for a year and a half did not prevent a fiasco, writes **Nehad Selaiha**



photo: Sherif Sonbol

The newly renovated Gomhouriya Theatre, prestige venue and one of the jewels in the crown of the State Theatre Sector

Well, it finally happened. Or has it really? After many delays and a lot of fooling about to decide upon a date, the National Theatre Conference was held last week at three sites simultaneously — the National, El-Tali'a and the Puppet theatres. The organisers — the members of the theatre committee of the Supreme Council of Culture — had supposedly spent almost a year and a half preparing for this momentous event, doing research and collecting data, and had meant it, as they repeatedly announced, as an occasion for a public, democratic debate on the future of the Egyptian theatre. Within a few hours of the official opening, however, it became apparent that the committee's months of deliberation had yielded nothing but a boring and diffuse rehash of old slogans and outdated views, and that the thrust of the conference was not towards the future but, rather, in the direction of the past.

Alfred Farag, the head of the theatre committee and the conference, set the tone in his keynote speech: he conjured up a golden vision of the sixties and his rousing rhetoric was redolent with nostalgia. Incredulously, I listened to him making an impassioned plea for more control, more committees and more bureaucracy. Oblivious of all historical, political and economic changes, he argued for stricter state control of the theatre through 'specialised committees' manned by his generation. As if we did not have enough of those! He and his generation, he seems to be saying, had produced 'good, serious' theatre in the sixties and would do it again if they were put in power. The drift of the argument was that salvation lay not in dismantling the old and ailing state-theatre structure and looking for alternative modes of state support and a freer, more open system of work, but in preserving the status quo (with a few minor alterations) and providing it with better administration (more strictures) to improve its efficiency.

No wonder the young theatre people in the audience were enraged. Farag's speech seemed like a calculated attempt to channel the conference from the start into one specific ideological direction and preempt the expression of any different views. The deeply-entrenched ideological bias of the committee and its hierarchical discriminatory view of theatre were clearly pronounced in the allocation of sites to the different sub-committees. Whereas the sub-committee dealing with the state theatre organisation enjoyed the coolness and red plush seats of the National, the one devoted to regional and amateur theatre was banished to the Puppet, condemned to roast in sweltering heat.

During the first day (the conference lasted for three) I kept moving around among different sites hoping for something fresh. Playwright Saadeddin Wahba presided over the first session of the state theatre committee at the big hall of the National and clamped down on all opposition. An exciting and challenging paper submitted by the playwright Mohamed Salmawi proposing new ways of funding theatre away from the government was greeted with scathing sarcasm from Mr Wahba and was peremptorily dismissed. It was the same story at the Puppet, but more lively, with more shouting and screaming. The audience there were predominantly young and fiery, and given the suffocating heat and the chairman's insistence that no subjects other than those on the official agenda of the conference be discussed, no wonder tempers ran high. More incensing still was the fact that the young people present were not allowed to suggest solutions to their own problems other than those put forward by the organisers, and were merely asked to unquestioningly endorse the recommendations of their 'elders and betters'. On the other hand, the invited representatives of the so-called 'private theatre sector' proved much wiser. They were conspicuous by their absence. I suppose they had better things to do.

Anyone even remotely connected with the Egyptian theatre nowadays knows that things are not what they should be and that something urgently needs to be done if theatre is to survive, let alone thrive. The sad thing is that the problems are well-known, and so are the solutions, if only people would open their eyes and clear their heads of the sixties clutter. Space and the freedom to make theatre and raise funds untrammeled by restrictive laws and regulations are all that is required. The manifesto of the first Free Theatre Festival made this point seven years ago and unfortunately it is still valid today. The National Theatre Conference would have been well-advised to start from there. As it was, it yielded nothing but a long list of recriminations, an even longer list of recommendations — see alongside and judge for yourselves if it was really worth it — gallons of tea and coffee and mounds of cake.

Recommendations from the National Theatre Conference:

General:

1) Changing current censorship legislation which allows authorities other than the censor to impose cuts on art and artists. That the artist should not be held accountable for his artistic and professional work except within his syndicate and that a representative of the syndicate council and its legal adviser be present at any interrogation with the artist that takes place outside the syndicate.

2) That rates of theatre tax, as well as taxes on tickets, be streamlined according to the prices of tickets and that a percentage of the tax should be used to finance theatre renovations.

3) Altering the current concession contracts to ensure an annual increase in wages, and to work on implementing internationally-decreed legislation.

4) Enforcing international agreements on copyright guaranteeing authors' rights.

5) Applying the president's recommendation that television advertisements for the state theatre be free of charge and that its productions be screened for reasonable fees, and reducing television advertisement costs, taxes and fiscal stamps for private sector theatre.

6) Reducing advertisement fees in newspapers, magazines and billboards as well as reducing fiscal stamp rates for the private and public theatres.

7) Delegating graduates of the Higher Theatre Institute for a two-year employment scheme at university youth centres as well as encouraging them to join provincial troupes and youth centres.

8) Issuing a periodical focusing on university, school, workers' and amateur theatre.

9) That the Theatre Committee should follow up on the implementation of these recommendations.

State-run theatre:

1) Instigating an organisational cadre that would combine the theatre and folk arts under the name "The Theatre and Folk Arts Union", composed of financially, administratively and artistically independent troupes.

2) Revitalising the artistic bureau consisting of the troupe manager, as well as elected members including artists and technicians in addition to three public figures for three years.

3) Putting on hold all new appointments while re-evaluating and redistributing the work-force without prejudicing the rights of those made redundant.

4) Providing a theatre for each troupe.

5) Developing existing theatres and establishing new ones, while making use of already existing theatrical spaces in state-owned halls and open spaces.

Private sector theatre:

1) Re-introducing subsidies for troupes in need of funding; eligibility for subsidies — provided by the Ministry of Culture — would be subject to the criteria of the Theatre Committee.

2) Re-introducing subsidies in governorates (with the exception of Cairo) for every performance approved by the Theatre Committee.

3) Selecting worthwhile productions to be entered in festivals and theatrical events.

4) That the state should encourage the construction of theatres by reserving necessary spaces in the provinces, new cities and in Cairo's districts, and that it should waive taxes in order to facilitate the investors' task, as well as exempting the necessary technical equipment from excise duty as with state-run theatres.

5) Allowing worth-while productions to be performed in available state-run theatres for a small fee.

6) Reducing electricity cost.

Theatre in the provinces:

1) Increasing the number of theatres in the provinces, providing at least one well-equipped theatre centre with library-facilities and study rooms in each governorate.

2) Encouraging the use of mobile theatres by providing fully equipped vans.

3) Creating the necessary budget-allocation for troupes in the provinces.

4) Organising training courses.

5) Setting up a special body for co-ordination between cultural palace theatres and those present in schools, factories and companies.

6) Reviewing the financial status of artists in the provinces with the aim of increasing their remuneration.

7) Co-ordinating with the Ministry of Tourism in order to allow for the better use of tourist sites.

8) Providing modern means of communication for provincial theatres.

9) Publishing the Theatre Magazine, *presently a quarterly, on a monthly basis.*

10) Paying greater attention to jury committees arbitrating in theatre competitions in the provinces, with the additional expertise of distinguished theatre critics.

11) Holding play-writing competitions.

University theatre:

1) Subsidising the budget for theatrical activities through competitions, and raising the value of awards; setting charters that would improve standards and safeguard freedom of expression.

2) Establishing theatre training centres and holding technical courses for students interested in theatrical activities.

School theatre:

1) Holding training courses in theatre arts and techniques for those responsible for school theatre.

2) Upgrading charters and curricula in university theatre departments to better prepare graduates for their prospective roles.

3) Devoting a lesson for art appreciation.

4) Foregrounding the importance of theatrical activities in all schools.

5) Taking stock of all school theatres not being used and re-equipping them in order to have at least one theatre for each educational zone.

Youth theatre:

1) Paying special attention to halls in youth centres which can be upgraded and equipped with technical facilities to be provided by state theatres.

2) Holding special seminars and workshops to spread theatrical awareness and theatre culture, sponsored by the state-run theatre.

3) Using venues of the Supreme Council for Sports when there are no sport events.

Workers' theatre:

1) Repairing the theatre at the headquarters of the Trade Unions' Council, upgrading its architecture and technical equipment in co-operation with the state and using it for theatrical performances in return for reduced prices for Trade Union members; also upgrading existing theatres in companies and factories.

2) Publishing theatre-related material and reviews of plays by workers' theatre troupes.

3) Holding theatre competitions, beside the annual workers' competition, and encouraging productions of one-act plays.

4) Encouraging the engagement of professionals in workers' competitions

Amateur theatre:

1) Providing state-subsidy for amateur festivals, and providing the best of amateur performances with the opportunity to stage their productions at state-run theatres and those belonging to the Cultural Palaces Organisation.

2) The Cultural Palaces Organisation should be in charge of co-ordinating subsidies and grants for amateur troupes, including grants from international organisations.

Plain Talk

Dr Walter Licht is a historian. He is also the vice dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, a job which entails quite a bit of administrative work. This, however, does not hinder his academic activities. Indeed, one of the facts which impressed me during my sojourn at Penn is that all the administrative staff are, at the same time, leading academics in their respective fields. This combination gives a certain credibility to the work of the administration.

My meetings with Dr Licht gave me a first hand knowledge of the studies pursued at Penn, especially in the School of Arts and Sciences. He was particularly proud of the university's post-graduate programme. While Penn offers its graduate students outstanding faculty and facilities, what truly distinguishes its graduate programmes is the "synergy that combines these rich resources in a spectrum of interdisciplinary pursuits." As aptly put in the brochure about the university's graduate programmes: "Spanning the university's many areas of traditional specialised studies is a common goal of graduate education in Penn: to cultivate each scholar's ability to bridge the boundaries that define disciplines and to make the connections that produce deeper insights."

I was very impressed by the university's system of fellowships and service awards. While the graduate programmes are costly, the vast majority of full-time doctoral students receive financial support of some kind over the course of their studies. Much of this financing is provided through scholarships, fellowships and teaching and research assistantships.

Among the major resources that the university taps into are Philadelphia's many cultural centres. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, for example, and the Rodin Museum, which features the largest collection of Rodin's works outside France, provide extensive resources for students of arts and humanities. The Barnes Foundation affords access to one of the world's most important collections of French Impressionist paintings. University students can get cheap tickets for the city's many cultural and recreational resources, like the Philadelphia Orchestra, which is one of the world's premiere symphonic groups, the Academy of Music, the Pennsylvania Ballet and Opera Company, the Philadelphia Theatre Company and many others.

Back to my meeting with Dr Licht. A topic which we discussed and which I find very important was how to promote Arabic studies at the university. The Arabic Department, headed by Roger Allen, was the first in any American university to be established. Dr Licht was worried about the dwindling number of students and the lack of cooperation with Arab universities. This issue of the state and the status of such studies in American universities and other non-Arab universities is vital and, in my opinion, should be studied and addressed at high levels, by, for example, the Arab League Educational and Scientific Organisation. It seems a pity to find flourishing centres for Judaic studies in many US universities and very few, if any, of Arabic or Islamic studies. At the University of Pennsylvania, for instance, there is the Centre for Judaic Studies, with 175,938 volumes in its library. The Centre receives contributions from leading Jewish organisations and individuals.

I believe that Arab countries should contact universities to discuss with them the possibility of establishing centres of Arabic studies where they do not exist and strengthening already existing ones. Publicity and the countering of negative stereotypes of Arabs is not only a political, but also a cultural and civilisational task. The universities and the world of academia should be the terrain for what one can call cultural investment. Joint study programmes can be created between Arab and American universities, with the exchange of students, joint supervision and the establishment of special chairs for Arabic studies.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Dead and buried

About halfway down Mar Girgis Street, nestled at the end of a small alley off the Maadi Corniche, almost opposite the Nilometre, **Fayza Hassan** discovers the Frenchman's Tomb — a forgotten, only recently classified monument, pathetically attempting to tell a story of past splendour

The tomb of Soliman El-Fransawi is a beautiful structure of brick and cast iron built in the mid 19th century. Nearby is the simple tomb of his Greek wife, Maryam. The whole area surrounding the tomb, now occupied by houses and shops, was once the site of Soliman's palace.

Soliman Pasha El-Fransawi (1788-1860) was born Joseph Sèves into a Lyon family of cloth merchants. He joined the army and fought in Napoleon's European campaigns. In 1819, after the collapse of the republic, he came to Egypt, where Mohamed Ali was hiring European instructors to rebuild his army. Sèves had been involved in a plot to liberate Marshal Ney from prison, and had been forced to leave France in a hurry when the plot failed.

"He landed in Egypt, in search of a job," writes Afaf Lutfi El-Sayyid Marsot in *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), "as many of his compatriots had done, and to bolster his chances of being hired he posed as an officer of the imperial army." Although "in the French army he had never risen beyond the rank of corporal and had been cashiered for insubordination," then pardoned and reinstated, in Egypt he posed as a colonel.

Mohamed Ali and his generals had seen British and French troops in action and were impressed by their martial arts, writes Marsot. The *wali* now wanted a modernised army. The troops, however, did not take kindly to Mohamed Ali's attempts to change their traditional system and he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt. This was sufficient motive for Mohamed Ali to search elsewhere for sources of army recruits.

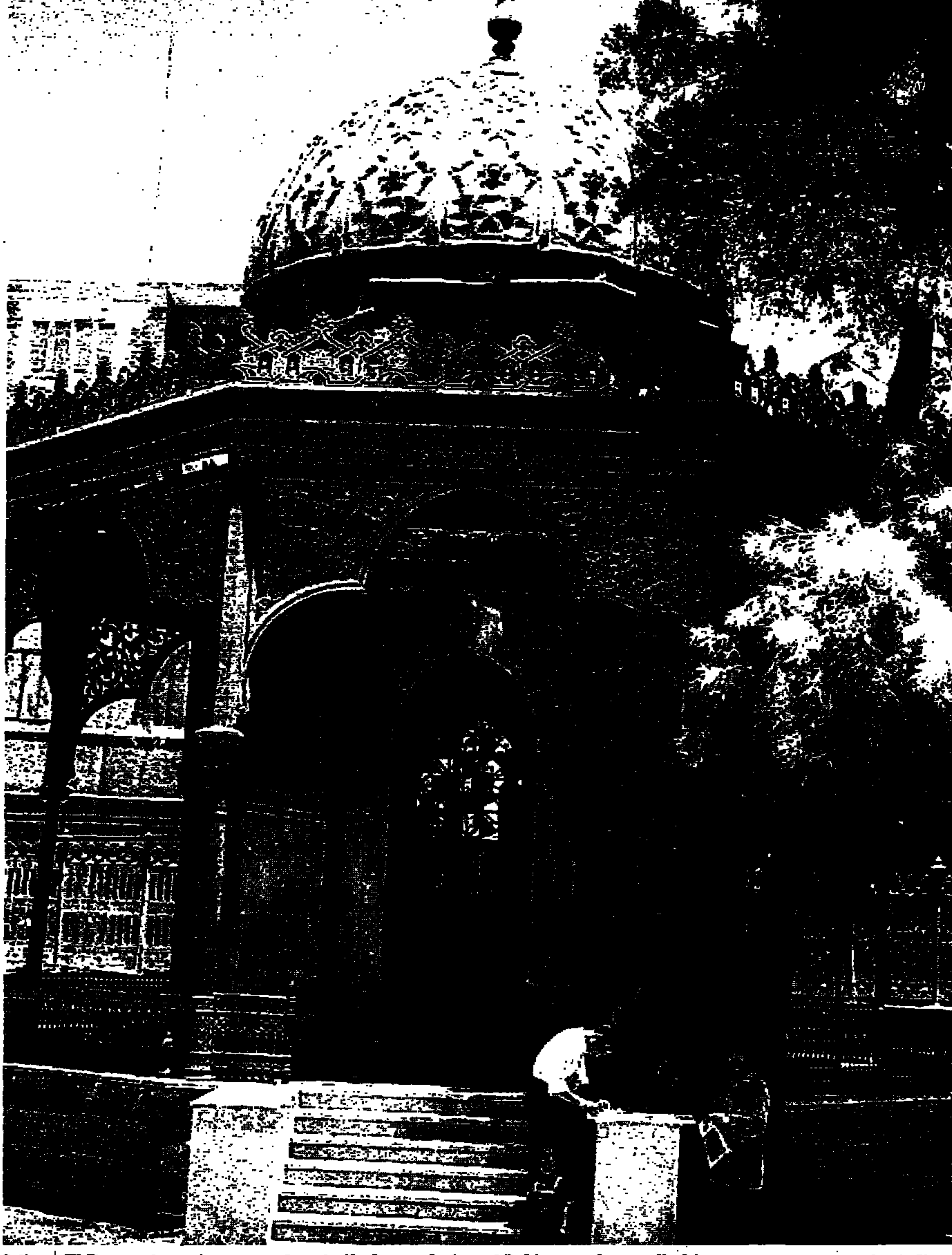
The Ottomans no longer wanted to send Mamelukes to Egypt, and the idea of having an army of Sudanese slaves failed for a number of reasons. "It was then that the idea of an army of Egyptian *fellahin* was suggested to Mohamed Ali," writes Marsot. At first the *wali* was reluctant to have Egyptians in his troops, but necessity forced him to change his mind. He began recruiting small numbers locally and sent them to the Sudan to replace the Albanians, who were suffering from a climate to which they were unaccustomed. The experiment having proved successful, the bulk of the army was later drafted from among Egyptian *fellahin*.

Mohamed Ali created a military academy in Aswan and the first nucleus of the *Nizam Gadid*, the new regiments, composed of former Mamelukes and some slaves from the Sudan, were trained there by Sèves.

The Frenchman had a great deal of trouble winning the trust and respect of the men for whose training he was responsible, mainly because he could not speak the language and was a non-Muslim. His courage in standing up to them finally won him their admiration, however, and they accepted his instruction. He, on the other hand, embraced Islam and took the name of Soliman. He was able "to introduce revolutionary principles of war," writes Adel Sabit (*Seven Centuries of History*, Cairo 1993). "This meant the organisation of a French type army corps, divisions, battalions and regimental units. A special importance was given to the organisation of military logistics supply echelon and the military infrastructure."

Soliman accompanied Ibrahim Pasha on the Greek and Syrian campaigns and was made a pasha. It is said that Khedive Abbas ignored him, but he regained some of his influence during the reign of Said.

The tomb in which he is buried was commissioned by his wife from the German architect Carl Wilhelm Valentin von Diebitsch (b Liegnitz 1819-d Cairo 1869) and is today one of the few remaining testimonies of the work of this architect in Egypt. According to the research of Marianne Guillet (CEDEJ, *Observatoire Urbain du Caire Contemporain*, Lettre d'information no 37, July 1994), in 1852, at the Seventh Conference of German Engineers in Braunschweig, von Diebitsch presented a novel idea, that of a modern adaptation and transposition of Islamic architectural motifs: all sorts of designs could be easily and cheaply reproduced in plaster, iron, stucco or any other appropriate material in workshops, then transported and fitted on the inside and outside of buildings.



Soliman El-Fransawi rests in peace under a badly damaged *tabut* while his mausoleum sadly fritters away — *photos: Randa Shaath*

Von Diebitsch expounded on a vision of German houses where all the interior and exterior decoration would be Moorish, mass-produced and prefabricated. His idea was not well received. Ten years later, however, he had a chance to put it into practice in Egypt.

There were a great number of European architects in Egypt during this period, all hoping for expensive commissions. Anxious to be more competitive, von Diebitsch devised a complete system of prefabrication. Every finished piece was wrapped up and packed safely in huge containers in Germany, and taken from Berlin by train to Trieste, where the containers were loaded onto ships sailing to Alexandria, then put on trains travelling to Cairo. In that way, he told his prospective clients, a rich and splendid project could be executed rapidly at a fraction of the usual cost.

For the tomb of Soliman El-Fransawi, von Diebitsch used great expanses of cast iron, used on this large scale for the first time in Egypt, and transported ready-made from the German factory. His achievement is still unique. The iron forms an ornate verandah, decorated with scrolls and flowers, which surrounds the plaster-covered brick octagonal base. Above, the cupola is also in cast iron, each section intricately wrought with rosettes and sprays of flowers. Originally it was painted and gilded. There are doors in alternate walls of the base. Inside, the marble *tabut* is in a very bad state of disrepair and so are the few marble steps leading inside.

The monument generally suffers from neglect and seems to have been abandoned for many years. According to Mahmoud Sabit, a direct descendant of the Fransawi family, a *waqf* of 15 feddans was provided by Maryam for the upkeep of her and her husband's tombs. Administrative complications have prevented the revenue of these feddans to be released, however, and "consequently," says Sabit, "we have been unable to start serious restoration on this unique monument."

Sadly forgotten, the tomb is at present the object of the lackadaisical efforts of "novice restorers", recent graduates of the Faculty of Fine Arts, who are attempting to replace some of the chipped, painted ceramics which once decorated the interior walls. Even to the untrained eye, this work does not bode well for von Diebitsch's legacy.



My best friend

The day I met Maureen, I believed she had been placed miraculously in my path. My daughter was starting her mid-year holidays and my current baby-sitter had let me down on a few hours' notice. Maureen's daughter was in the same class as mine. "It would be no problem at all, really," she said. My daughter adored her and I went out of my way to do what I could to express my immense, undying gratitude. We became best friends.

She confided in me. She was married to a boor and was terribly unhappy. She insinuated that he was violent. We started inviting her and the children over on weekends. We did her shopping at the same time as ours. Her husband, she said, never lifted a finger at home. He was more of an oriental pasha than Haroun El-Rashid himself. My husband would shake his head self-righteously: He, unlike poor Maureen's sultan, helped at home.

Was he not the perfect husband? She echoed his words. If she had such a gentle, loving partner, she would work her fingers to the bones, really, to make him happy. I pointed out that I did, and that, apart from the very occasional session with the vacuum cleaner, he had a marked tendency to take it easy. "You don't deserve him," Maureen would giggle, seemingly tickled at the idea that I was openly criticising my husband. Hers would never tolerate such behaviour, she would whisper.

For a long time, we met Maureen and the children alone. We never saw the husband. Whenever we inquired, she would shrug "out drinking somewhere probably," and would sigh, the picture of a wounded angel.

Maureen had a knack for looking vulnerable. At the very beginning of my relationship with my husband, I had cast myself in the part of the tough woman who took all the punches standing. Maureen on the other hand, was positively fragile. She was slowly beginning to get on my nerves.

One night she called us, sobbing. Her husband had thrown her out of the house. A friend had lent her a small apartment (she emphasised its smallness), but she did not know what would become of her and the children... We reassured her as best we could, but the sun was rising when we finally put down the phone. There followed a period during which my husband spent his weekends carrying furniture for her, repainting her bathroom and taking her shopping. I started asking myself questions, then asked them of my husband. "How could you be so ungrateful?" was his answer. I had never been crass, but maybe jealousy was getting in the way of my level-headedness. I had really become quite impatient with Maureen's unending saga and I avoided her whenever I could come up with a half-decent excuse.

Meanwhile, her apartment, which was in no way smaller than ours, was beginning to look quite smart. My husband had done a good job with the wallpaper and I suspected that the bits of antique furniture that tastefully decorated her living room came from the same dealer we had bought our own furniture from. So far, his whereabouts had been a well-guarded secret. Now we shared it with Maureen.

Our relationship ground to a halt the day my husband told me that Maureen had snagged an interview for a fantastic job with a film producer. She was giving a small dinner party for her potential boss. She had asked my husband to host it. "As the maitre d'?" I snickered nastily. "As her husband," said my husband rather defiantly. Sweetly, Maureen wanted to play make-believe for the producer's benefit: with my husband masquerading as a wealthy French count, she believed, she would appear sufficiently exotic and chic to eliminate the competition.

The next day, I invited Maureen to lunch, just her and me. "Look, darling," I said once we had ordered our salads, "I have just received an unbelievable offer. I will be making pots of money, literally. The problem is, I have to move to another state. Well, I thought that, since you like my family so much, you will not mind taking my place... Of course I shall leave my daughter with you, you are so good with her." Maureen suddenly seemed extremely unhappy. She left without finishing her salad. I never saw her again. But I did meet her husband.

He was a tennis coach in a small club, not a drunk. He worked long hours trying to make ends meet. He readily admitted that Maureen was too much for him. A rather sweet man, he was definitely not suitable for an ambitious woman on her way up. "Maureen did not want your husband," he said gently. "She thought that having him around would add to her own prestige. She watches too many movies..."

He was looking after their children and was thinking of hiring a permanent baby-sitter. If I wanted to send my daughter around, I was welcome, he told me. "And where is Maureen?" I couldn't help asking. "Did she get the job with the film company?" Her husband chuckled. "Maureen never did a day's work in her life," he said. "But she is marrying the producer."

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Fereek or husked wheat and meat casserole

Ingredients:
1/2 kg. beef or veal cutlets (boiled)
1 1/2 cups husked wheat
1 large onion (grated)
1 cup tomato juice
1 tbsp. tomato paste
3 cups meat stock
Butter
Salt+pepper+allspice

Method:
Clean the wheat and soak in hot water for one hour. In a cooking pan, gently fry the onion until tender. Strain and drain the wheat from its water and add the onion. Stir until well blended, then add the seasoning and the tomato juice and paste. Bring to a boil and remove from heat. In a baking dish, put half the quantity of the husked wheat, add the meat cutlets, then add the remaining wheat. Pour the stock over it and bake in a preheated medium oven for 45 minutes to one hour. Serve hot with a vegetable or green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Warm leatherette

Andrew Steele feels the quality

Italian is the tag that La Piazza at the Four corners in Zamalek gives itself, although the menu, despite its predilection for pasta, is no more reminiscent of the piazzas and trattorias of Italy than, well, the Chinese restaurant next door. But there is a difference that La Piazza should pride itself on — and this is crucial — it's actually much much better than the majority of its mid-range pseudo-European counterparts.

The decor is light, bright, breezy, and frankly, piazza like — one feels that there could be a fountain just out of one's field of view. And although the finer points do not bear close scrutiny, the overall impression is rather adult, rather civilised, rather, dare I say it, European.

As is often the case in such a space, one can sit on a chair facing the wall, or a bench seat that borders the room. It was the bench seats that were covered in the inevitable leatherette — the sort that sticks to legs and makes indiscreet squelching noises when it warms and one attempts to stand up.

But the food, the food. Leatherette aside, it made for a very fine, if not particularly frugal evening. I began with a Salade de Poissons Fumés — generous portions of salmon, mackerel and eel, with shredded vegetables as centrepiece. The fish, particularly the eel, was deliciously smoky and the vegetables regally dressed with a classic vinaigrette. Quite the best starter I've had for some time. My companion chose the Toast de Chevre Chaud en Salade which was nearly as impressive — the just melted roulades of goat's cheese had quite a kick and were served on soft, fresh buns. The simple lettuce salad that accompanied had more of the aforementioned vinaigrette. Dressed to perfection was my associates's comment. It was then that I realised that I had been eclipsed by the food, and it was not my new shirt that was receiving the full measure of her attention.

The main course was then brought by the waiter, whose notion of good service quite patently included such adjectives as "discreet", "attentive", "courteous" and "with a minimum of fuss". Had we been asked to comment, we would certainly have agreed.

Tournedos aux Champignons was my choice, my chum opting for the Gratin de Fruit de Mer Atlantide. My meat was magnificent, the knife slicing through it as if it were butter, the sauce was clear and savoury, the vegetables were fresh. The constituent parts of any mixed seafood dish in this city seem to be similar — grouper fillet, shrimps and calamari. Nothing to break the mould here then. Presented in a light, slightly cheesy gratin it was declared not spectacular but perfectly good. I feel that it is in the nature of gratinated seafood to be slightly dour, so the fact that it paled into second place alongside everything else we ordered, I think, was simply the fault of the dish itself, not chef nor ingredients.

I recommend La Piazza. The food is excellent, the menu extensive, the service impeccable, and with a bill of LE160 for two, it is, if anything, a little cheaper than many of its counterparts. With fare this fine, one can almost forgive them their warm leatherette.

La Piazza, The Four Corners, 4A Hassan Sabry Street, Zamalek

Al-Ahram Weekly

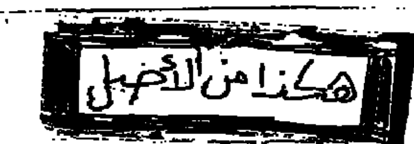
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Pouch in bird's gullet where food is stored for digestion (4)
5. Forceful throw (4)
9. Fascination; bewitch (5)
14. One's family background (4)
15. Comb. form for "oil" (4)
16: Quay (5)
17. A kitchen apparatus (4)
18. Archaic "until" (4)
19. Show excessive emotion (5)
20. Asian coin (3)
21. Age (3)
22. Black, Red or Dead (3)
24. Rainy weather (3)
25. German city (5)
27. Scorches (5)
29. Spike of wood; stab (5)
32. African fly that causes sleeping disease (6)
36. Self (3)
39. Arab long robe (5)
41. Presses (5)
42. Vitamin A (7)
44. Employs; interlocks (7)
46. Departure (5)
47. Sudden unsteady movement (5)
49. Suffix forming nouns (3)
50. Orifices through sponge from which water is expelled (6)
52. Truly, archaic (5)
54. Theatrical entertainment of short satirical sketches and songs (5)
56. Song for the dead (5)
60. Diagrammatic representation of a route (3)
63. The greatest creation (3)
64. Idiosyncrasy (3)
66. Born (3)
67. Religious cape (5)
69. Poultry enclosure (4)
71. Spirit lamp (4)
72. Inert gas used in fluorescent lamps (5)
73. Japanese tree sap used as arrow poison (4)
74. Portuguese coins (4)
75. Oblong piece of cast metal (5)
76. Comb. form for "far" (4)
77. Stone or sand particles causing discomfort (4)

DOWN
1. Elected (5)
2. Wanders (5)
3. Prophetic significances (5)
4. Write (3)
5. part of day (4)
6. Forearm bone (4)
7. Soften flax by soaking (3)
8. Untied (5)
9. Of keen vision; discerning, hyph. wds. (12)
10. Dress border (3)
11. Confess (4)
12. An elaborate plexus of blood vessels (4)
13. Congregate; live up to (4)
21. Ensnarement (12)
23. Dine (3)
26. Weather directions (2)
27. Outer space as seen from the earth (3)
28. Wheys (4)
30. Nigerian tribe (3)
31. Cry out (4)
33. Roman loose flowing garment (4)
34. Lop off, Sc. (4)
35. Existence (4)
36. Therefore, L. (4)
37. George; pl. abb. (4)
38. Pertaining to the ear (4)
40. Comb. form for "air" (4)
43. Ruin, jumbled (4)
45. Military abb. for a person not holding official duties (3)
48. Employ (3)
51. Miss Gardner (3)
53. Part of UK's parliament, abb. (2)
55. Entire (5)
57. Write in ledger (5)
58. Demons; prodigies (5)
59. Fermenting agent (5)
60. Comb. form for "very large" (4)
61. So be it (4)
62. Single short high ringing sound (4)
64. Young horse (4)
65. A semicircular recess with a domed roof (4)
68. Dove's call (3)
70. Poetic form for "not closed" (3)
71. Unit of energy (3)

Last week's solution





Young men suspected of selling blood professionally (see: "Blood money").

Blood money

EMAD Amin Abdel-Hadi was desperate. The 27-year old graduate of a vocational school had left his home in Menoufiya following a family row and came to Cairo to look for a job. On his fourth day in the capital, virtually penniless, he was approached by two men who offered him what seemed to be a lifeline: a 20-pound-a-day job.

The men took Abdel-Hadi to a flat in the working-class district of Boulaq and offered him free food and lodging for two days. On the third day, the two individuals in question accompanied him to a hospital and asked him to donate his blood. Broke and desperate, Abdel-Hadi had to accept. He was paid LE20 for the donation. Unable to find a job, he continued to work for the two men as a full-time blood donor. The two men, who employed other blood donors, sold the sack of blood to blood centres for LE30, making LE10 per sack. With about 20 donors under their control, making blood donations as often as every two days, the racketeers prospered. But Abdel-Hadi did not.

After donating blood about 10 times in 20 days, Emad's blood cell count was so low he had to be admitted to hospital himself. There, he told his story and the police moved in to arrest the racketeers and at least one medic involved in the transfers.

Two large Cairo hospitals are currently under investigation for allegedly accepting the blood donated by the professionals in violation of health regulations. Blood centres' regulations do not allow the same individuals to donate blood at shorter than three-month intervals. Preliminary investigations suggest that the said blood transfers also violated essential testing procedures. Some blood centres have allegedly made financial gains from cooperating with the racket, selling the blood sacks to hospitals for LE100 pounds, thus making a profit of LE70 per sack.

Thicker than water, and riskier

With concern over the safety of blood transfusions on the rise, efforts are under way to ensure the quality of the nation's blood supply, as **Gihan Shahine** found out



Blood testing and classification : The Health Ministry says it upgraded services in dozens of state-run centres

Mona Abdel-Wahab is haunted by the thought that she could have contracted the HIV or Hepatitis C viruses had she received a blood transfusion. Abdel-Wahab, a cardiac patient, was transferred to Ain Shams Hospital suffering from internal and external haemorrhage. A blood transfusion was immediately needed. Her blood type (O+) being a rare one, was not available at the hospital. Her husband had to buy two blood containers from the nearest private hospital — at double the going rate at public hospitals.

When Ain Shams staff analysed the two containers, they pronounced both to be infectious, one with HIV and one with Hepatitis C.

Fortunately, Abdel-Wahab survived without needing to use the suspected containers of blood. Her husband is now suing the hospital which sold him the blood. The story, which appeared in the Egyptian press, gave rise to public and official concern about the reliability of the nation's blood banks.

The head of the private hospital in question pleaded not guilty. He said that the two blood containers were analysed beforehand and found virus-free. He expressed the belief that "an error must have happened somewhere, but not in this hospital," practically questioning the validity of Ain Shams tests.

Playing safe: According to blood specialists, blood analysis goes through a two-step process: a preliminary test called "ELISA," and a second one called the "Western Blot." The ELISA never gives a false negative. If the result is negative, the blood is safe and there is no need to conduct the second, more expensive, test.

A positive result on the ELISA test, however, has a one-third error margin; according to Dr Mona Salaheddin, head of the Red Cross blood bank. In case of positive results, the blood should be immediately sent to the Ministry of Health laboratories for further tests. "In most cases," Salaheddin explains "the ministry takes the safe precaution of disposing of the whole container, even if the final results are negative."

The head of the hospital in question claims that the Ain Shams Hospital "hastened to declare the two blood sacks infectious without bothering to conduct the final test for confirmation."

Dr Mervat El-Kilani, head of the Ain Shams blood bank, says that the results were so conclusive that no further tests were needed. "And still we sent the containers to the ministry afterwards," she adds.

An investigation into the matter is under way, but the story generated a debate on the reliability of blood banks and the ministry's role in monitoring the country's blood supply.

According to a ministerial decree, no blood should be transmitted to a patient or accepted from a donor before thorough tests are conducted. These tests routinely cover the hemoglobin level, syphilis, AIDS, and Hepatitis C and B.

Dr Hamdi El-Sayed, chairman of the Doctors' Syndicate, says that the Ministry of Health conducts regular spot checks of all blood banks in the country. The ministry analyses samples of blood taken from the blood bank's stock and checks on the equipment and procedures used by the bank.

The establishment of blood centres is subject to rigorous criteria, according to Dr Yanaa Youssif El-Hayatmi, former head of Qasr El-Aini blood bank. Blood banks should be affiliated to hospitals having a minimum capacity of 100 beds and sizable surgery departments.

Achieving reliability: Officials at the Ministry of Health maintain that they have upgraded the services of over 200 government-run blood centres, supplying them with up-to-date equipment for ELISA tests as well as equipment for the separation of blood components.

But specialists feel there is a need to do more. Some claim that patients receiving regular blood transfusions are exposed to viral infections. Dr Sherif Omar, head of the People's Assembly Health Committee, says that Egypt needs a new system to regulate donations and guarantee blood safety. "We have to look into the causes for the occasional unreliability of blood banks." Omar advises.

The lack of blood availability is one of these causes. Specialists complain that the public is reluctant to donate blood and that banks sometimes need to accept donations from unreliable donors.

The public reluctance to donate blood is due to a widespread misconception that donation is unhealthy to the donor. Dr Maged Zayid, head of the Ain Shams Specialised Hospital, says that donation is actually beneficial because it activates the blood circulation. Despite that, he adds, even the patient's relatives sometimes refuse to donate their blood, preferring to buy it instead.

Seeking donors: The demand for blood is extensive. According to El-Kilani, the Ain Shams University Hospital processes an average total of 14,503 blood sacks a year, but remains short of meeting the patients' needs. The Red Crescent collects an average of 1,000 sacks a month, but approximately 15 per cent of these are found infected and discarded. The remainder falls short of the demand, according to Salaheddin. She says that the anti-cancer institute and Abul-Rish Hospital are allotted 60 per cent of the available quantity but their needs are much higher. One cancer patient, she notes, may need two sacks a week.

For private blood banks, the problem is even more daunting. Only public banks are allowed to launch donation campaigns. Private banks have to rely on professional donors who regularly sell their blood to supplement their income. These donors, Omar says, may include drug addicts and sufferers from anaemia.

Despite Health Ministry control, experts doubt that all banks carry out all the necessary tests to guarantee the safety of every blood container. One reason is that testing is expensive. To go through all the necessary tests, one container may cost up to LE100.

State-run banks obtain subsidies from the Ministry of Health and are, therefore, able to sell blood at the official price of LE53 per sack. Private banks, while selling blood sacks at LE120, are under pressure to cut costs. This is why, some argue, they may be tempted to depend on earlier check-ups on individuals, instead of conducting new tests every time — a risky practice, as Dr El-Kilani says.

Some experts believe that blood banks should not be left in the hands of private entities. "For private banks, the blood service is a business that should make profit. And this may affect their reliability," argues Dr Zayid.

There is a consensus among experts that more should be done to increase blood donations. Omar plans to submit a bill to the People's Assembly making it mandatory for the public to donate blood. He maintains that similar measures have proven useful in other countries, citing Saudi Arabia which has resolved its blood shortage by adopting this policy. El-Sayed is cautious about the proposal, recalling that a similar bill was rejected 10 years ago on the grounds that it violated human rights.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Cotton-fluffing blues

Back in the sixties, they were many. Players of a one-string, untuned harp. Fluffers of hairy buds that toss about in a cloud of white fibre. Not the hippies, not the gypsies, but an artistic lot still, and **Zeinab Abul-Gheit** has ventured into their dwindling territory

Tak, tak, tak. Mahmoud El-Zaim plays on his harp-like "bow" in Haret El-Menaggidin, or upholsterers' alley. The one-string instrument separates the cotton fibre, fluffs it up and prepares it for a life of incarceration, as the unseen filling of cushions, mattresses, and quilts.

To get to Haret *El-Menaggidin*, you have to pick your way through the alleys of El-Ghouriya in Islamic Cairo, past rows of small shops displaying a variety of head scarves, rugs, mats and household objects, past foreigners smoking the *shisha*, alongside locals in nearby cafés, and through a cloud of incense-scented dust. In the past, about 300 cotton upholsterers worked in Haret El-Menaggidin. Now, about 40 remain.

El-Zaim says that the '80s were the worst years for the industry, as competition from sponge-filled cushions and mattresses threatened to drive the cotton variety off the market. But, fortunately for the trade, the customers began to see the light. Unlike synthetic ones, cotton mattresses, El-Zaim argues, cause no back pains. The profession made a timid recovery in the '90s, he points out.

Mohamed Hassan, nicknamed Abul-Leil, is the oldest mattress maker in Haret El-Menaggidin. He says that he has been a *menaggid* for 60 years. In the past, the upholsterer was more dedicated to his profession. But the young generation of upholsterers work only for money, he laments.

In the past, Abul-Leil says the upholsterer would work five hours, beating the crude cotton with his bow. The young generation prefers to use a machine for this purpose. The bow, the older generation maintains, is much better than the machine, for it strengthens the fibre and prolongs the life of the cotton-stuffed products.

Excluding the price of materials, you can expect to be charged LE20 in labour cost for a quilt, LE15 for a mattress, and LE5 for a pillow, according to upholsterer El-Sayed Sabir. The price of a qantar (50 kilos) of *shaar*, the best type of cotton, is about LE400, according to Yeihya Adli, a cotton trader.

Witness for rent

Oath-takers are not always what they seem. **Sahar El-Bahr** investigates the phenomenon of perjury in Egyptian courts

A witness is about to take the stand in a Cairo court. The judge notices the witness is looking at his hand. No, he is reading from his hand! Upon close examination, it transpires that statements relevant to the case have been written on the witness's hand, statements of facts to which he was going to testify, and of which he knew nothing more than he was told. Welcome to the shadowy world of perjury.

"Litigants who need court witnesses can go directly to the nearest coffee shop to choose them," said script-writer Gamal Abdel-Aziz. "If they can't find them there, there are dozens of 'agents' who can find witnesses in a matter of minutes."

When Amr Mohamed went to El-Sananiri Civil Law Court in Shubra to conduct some business, he found himself the centre of attention. Outside the building he was approached by several litigants who wanted him to attest that their spouses had abused them. "They all assured me that this is totally safe and I would receive LE10," he said. Mohamed refused the offer, but others have no such scruples.

Amm Ahmed (not his real name), 65, makes a reasonable living as a professional perjurer. A retired civil servant, with adult children, he spends most of his day at a local coffee shop. He soon discovered that a good day's entertainment could be found at the nearby court and he started attending sessions.

"It was a hobby I enjoyed," *Amm* Ahmed explained. "One day a women asked me to take the stand as a witness in her case. She paid me LE10. Now I make LE40 a day."

Amm Ahmed met Samia Fouad through a "witness agent." The divorcee needed two people to testify that her husband had abused her. "The agent asked me when I would need the witness. I said 'tomorrow'. I thought it would be impossible. Ten minutes later, he brought me two witnesses," she recounted.

Fouad's ex-husband was suing her for custody of their children and the couple's flat. She was suing back for alimony. Winning the alimony case is crucial for Fouad, who doesn't work and has three children. Fouad's husband owns the building where their flat is located. He also owns shops and a company in the building. According to Fouad, her husband threatened his company employees with dismissal if they refuse to testify against her. She said he even threatened to dismiss the *bawwab*, or door keeper, if he did not testify that he saw strange men frequenting Fouad's flat.

Fortunately, Fouad said, the judge was too smart to be deceived by the perjurers. After the *bawwab* testified, the judge inquired as to whether or not the former knew Fouad's male relatives. The *bawwab* answered negatively and the judge concluded that the men Fouad allegedly entertained in her balcony could have been mere relatives. Case closed.

Under the law, perjury is punishable by two years in prison. If perjury, however, leads to a wrong conviction, the punishment could be life imprisonment.

Sherif Kamel, a judge, said the use of false witnesses is wide-spread and represents a major challenge to the justice system. The phenomenon is most common in divorce cases, he added. If a woman claims emotional or physical abuse as grounds for divorce, according to Islamic law, there must be either two men or two women and a man to support her claims. Relatives are often unwilling to testify in these cases, according to lawyer Amin El-Badawi, often due to family sensitivities.

Litigation delays complicate the problem. Frustrated by the resulting waste of time, says Lawyer Mustafa Uweis, genuine witnesses could lose interest in testifying. El-Badawi attributes the long delays to the overwhelming case-load on judges, who often have to conduct dozens of hearings on one day. "Witnesses should be treated with respect and their task should be made easier," Uweis said.



Between 50 and 2,000 people ascend into the depth of the Great Pyramid of Kufu every week seeking spiritual sustenance photo: Sherif Sonbol

Magical mystery tours

One can only speculate about how the Ancient Egyptian priests of Amun would have felt at the sight of today's worshippers at the Pyramids. **Nevine El-Aref** *set out to discover the spiritual tourism scene in Egypt*

Surprising as it may seem, between 50 and 2,000 people ascend into the depths of the Great Pyramid of Khufu for spiritual sustenance every week. People come to be revitalised, believing that the pyramid has a special power to provide health and longevity.

Al-Ahram Weekly, eager to know what this was all about, decided to join a group. This spiritual tour demanded that we meet our group at the Pyramids at the break of dawn. The group consisted primarily of Canadian women, sweltering uncomfortably in the early morning sun so different from the nippy mornings they are used to in the Canadian heartland.

The group leader walked solemnly into the Great Pyramid of Khufu bearing a copper bowl filled with sand, pebbles, incense and a candle, with the rest of the spiritually-seeking Canucks following.

Upon reaching the burial chamber, each member of the group took a position against the wall and carried out a variety of rituals before sitting. The leader then placed the candle and incense in the bowl and lit it. As the electric light was turned off, a sweet smell permeated the chamber. The group closed their eyes and ascended to another realm as they intoned a mysterious incantation. The climax occurred as a thick wave of silence enveloped the room, which these erstwhile pasty tourists rode to the far reaches of the ocean of the subconcious for what seemed like hours.

The group was accompanied by a state antiquities inspector and a tour guide. The former noted that some individuals were content to pray in the pyramid for a mere two hours, while others stayed in the pyramid all night.

Americans and Canadians are spiritual tourism's top enthusiasts, followed by French and then Japanese tourists. Each of these pilgrims of the soul performs rituals according to the dictates of his particular creed. These creeds bear such intriguing names as the Rosicrucians, Red Shrine, New Age Group, the One Symbol, the Arrow, the Purple Cross, and the Friends of the Soul.

An Egyptian belonging to the Rosicrucian Group said that they believe in the religion of Akhenaten, the world's first monotheist, and that many of them make a pilgrimage to the Pyramid of Khufu in the belief that the top of the pyramid sends cosmic rays and vibrations to them. The Rosicrucians continue their spiritual voyage at Tel El-Amarna, the seat of Akhenaten's sun worship, where they spend the whole day.

A Canadian woman who comes to pray inside the Great Pyramid four times a year said that her prayers give her the opportunity to discover the pyramid's spiritual power. "Our prayers are a spiritual trip towards the source of the ancient wisdom of the world," she said.

A Japanese man who is part of the New Age Group had a somewhat different take on the Great Pyramid at Giza. He said that the pyramid was built to enable people to rise from the normal conciousness of the three-dimensional world to feelings of cosmic, or Christ consciousness.

He continued that the Great Pyramid was built in a way that parallels the geometry of the human body. Just as there are black-light and white-light spirals that emanate from the human body, so there are similar spirals that come out of the Great Pyramid. One of these spirals used to pass through one end of the sarcophagus that was in the king's chamber. The energy rays created by this white-light spiral would pass through the worshipper's head. He could then link his feelings with the white-light spiral and perceive projections of higher impressions.

The New Age worshipper claimed that in ancient times, the initiate would stay in the king's chamber for three and a half days, after which he would be taken to the queen's chamber. Here, he says, different energy rays would help readjust the initiate back into the consciousness of the three-dimensional world.

"The shift that the initiate experiences, from third-dimensional to Christ consciousness, is the same shift that the human race will experience during planetary ascension," concluded the Japanese pilgrim, who requested anonymity.

A French woman of the same group, who also wanted her name to be withheld, said that God sent a man to build the pyramid in order to convey a message to humanity. "The architectural style of the Great Pyramid describes our life," she said. "The door of the pyramid is like the birth of a baby, the pyramid's corridor is the life which leads to the king's chamber, which represents the end of life and the reincarnation of Jesus."

A police officer on duty said that one Japanese gentleman came on three consecutive New Year's holidays to spend the entire night alone, "praying and reclining on the flagstones in foetal position with a radio cassette that guided him in his prayers".

The Egyptian tourism industry, naturally, has its eye on the less sublime aspects of this type of tourism. Some people come to Egypt for this kind of experience twice a year, others four times a year. The entrance fee for a group of up to 15 is LE2,000 and each group member over the limit of 15 pays an extra LE50. If these spiritual tourists want to remain in the pyramid area during daytime hours as regular tourists they have to pay an additional LE20 each. According to Zahi Hawwas, director of the Giza Plateau, this kind of tourism could provide a valuable source of income that could be used for the restoration of monuments.



Pyramid power rituals in Khufu's burial chamber photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

"After all," said a guard on duty who requested *to remain anonymous, "if someone was able to* convince these weirdos to believe all this nonsense about spirits, we should be able to convince them to hand over a little bit of cash to go towards the preservation of monuments that thousands of normal people enjoy every year."

Pyramid power for the new millennium

Some might think it premature, but not the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism. It's full steam ahead on projects for the turn of the century, as **Nevine El-Aref** finds out

The countdown to the year 2000 has already begun. Two and a half years before the big event, venues for millenium *celebrations* are being considered, and elsewhere, ceremonies in the Vatican, Spain, Paris, London and Bethlehem celebrating the Incarnation of Christ are planned. Despite this competition there is little doubt that Egypt has a lot to offer of its own, with over 22 sites associated with the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with American and European travel agencies, is already planning a campaign to celebrate the dawn of the new century at the foot of the Sphinx and Giza Pyramids, at Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, and in Luxor.

"Egypt can offer Pharaonic, Christian and Islamic sites," said an official of the Ministry of Tourism, "and such unique experiences as the Pyramids for those who believe in 'pyramid power' (the belief that the Pyramids were built by an extra-terrestrial force and cosmic vibrations, imparting health and longevity, emanate from them)." At the Pyramids there will be two kinds of celebrations, he went on. "One is a masked ball and the other a massive dinner party in a tent. In Sinai, a group *excursion on the eve of the new century* will climb Mount Sinai to watch the sun rising over the third millenium, and a Bedouin evening in the Sinai Desert near Sharm El-Sheikh will be another option. In Luxor there will be an opportunity for people to herald the occasion by staying in either the Luxor or Karnak temples for a night of prayer. Nile cruises operating between Luxor and Aswan also have special programmes."

And no small effort is being made to cater for what is confidently expected to be a bumper crop of tourists at the end of 1999. Not only are the ministries of culture and tourism collaborating for the event, but travel agencies in France, the USA and Japan have already proposed plans to stage events; the mountains of Southern Sinai will be lit up to create a spectacular backdrop for a performance by an international jazz band, and an American travel agent is negotiating with the Ministry of Culture to organise an opera performance on the Giza Plateau.

In addition, Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui, aware of the great attraction of Christian sites at this time, has requested the collaboration of the Coptic Church. "We have requested that they make a map of the important Christian sites, especially along the route leading from Northern Sinai to the Delta, Cairo and then on to Upper Egypt, where the Holy Family stayed during the Flight into Egypt."

The Christian sites will be upgraded, and in the next few years an effort will be made to enhance the environment around these religious sites, and provide the necessary utilities, access roads and all that is necessary to encourage visitors. "The Coptic Church will study the condition of the various historical sites, and ensure their restoration as necessary," said Beltagui.

Travel agencies reveal that bookings are already being made. For example, approximately 2,000 Japanese tourists are interested in climbing Mount Sinai to watch the sunrise. "They will start climbing at midnight," said Bahiga El-Gohari, who runs a travel agency. And Tareq Lutfi of the Mena House Oberoi Hotel said that 80 per cent of rooms have already been reserved. "Millennium clients will include spiritual groups and individuals from the United States who believe that energy emanates from the Pyramids, and want to be there to recharge their batteries," he said.

An easier arrival?

New airport procedures intended to facilitate *arrivals* in Egypt may be introduced, but some companies claim they would just complicate matters further. **Sherine Nasr** investigates

Tourist companies have severely criticised proposed regulations on arrival procedures issued by the passport department of the Ministry of the Interior on the grounds that they would complicate, rather than facilitate, entrance to Egypt.

The new regulations, supposed to have been implemented in May but in abeyance at present, make travel agents responsible for completing arrival procedures for groups, rather than the tourists themselves. Currently, group travellers have their documents checked at passport control before they meet their travel agent.

"Now," explained Maged El-Affendi, field coordinator and manager at Emeco Travel, "the travel agency is being asked to submit full details about the group to passport control prior to arrival. This includes the traveller's name, nationality, date of birth, address and other details, which are considered unnecessary."

Travel agencies see several potential problems. The first is that the tour operator abroad is expected to provide travel agents here with information which the operator may not have access to because a client reserves his trip by name only. "Further, the new system offers no confidentiality of information," El-Affendi said, adding that many clients are not keen to disclose their birth dates or the place the passport was issued.

Secondly, the actual number of members in a group is only confirmed a day or two before arrival, "thus we would never have time to compile an accurate list and deliver it in time," said El-Affendi.

Another potential problem concerns the arrival cards which are currently distributed to tourists on board the plane and filled in personally. Under the new procedures, the local agent is asked to complete the cards and put the $15 visa stamp on each. "On arrival, the completed cards will be handed to the tourists and the information checked against the passport list already handed in by the company. Each traveller will have his arrival card, not the passport, stamped," explained Said Kamel, head of the Cairo Airport Police. "By so doing, we ensure tourists will not have to deal with the control authorities at any legal port of entry. These measures, he believes, will promote smoother movement particularly at relatively small airports such as those of Hurghada and Sharm El-Sheikh."

But travel agents believe such a procedure would be fraught with complications.

"If the travel agent buys the $15 stamp for a group of say 50 tourists, and then the trip is cancelled at the last minute, this means that the company will bear the loss of $750," said El-Affendi. Another difficulty is to try and assemble the group when people arrive by different airlines. He described the idea of stamping the arrival cards as unprofessional. "What if a tourist loses his arrival card? Could he leave the country with a passport unstamped with details of his arrival?" he wondered.

"The new regulations may be fine in theory, but in practice they will make matters more complicated," he added.

Many tourist companies suggest that there are easier solutions to the problem of crowded airports. "For example, there could be more passport officers on duty to receive an influx of tourists," said Ashraf Seddiq from Amenophis Travel, who added that, at best, there are only two officers to be seen no matter how many planes are landing at the same time.

"Indeed, there is hardly any coordination between the airport authority and the passport control to decide on the number of officers needed for each shift," agreed El-Affendi.

While the new regulations are being reconsidered, existing airport procedures will remain in force.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are offering special prices for summer. *Prices are valid for* Egyptians and foreign residents

Travel agencies

Sobel Travel is offering trips to Europe and the USA as of July. Trips to Paris go for LE2,700 including accommodation in three-star hotels, breakfast included, as well as internal transportation and sightseeing tours.

Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE4,750 including accommodation in three-star hotels. A 14-day trip to the USA costs LE7,900 including visits to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Orlando and Miami. The price includes accommodation and internal transportation.

Hotels

Cairo

Semiramis Inter-Continental is offering a double room for LE120 per person, including a breakfast buffet, free access to the health club, the jacuzzi, sauna and swimming pool. If the client stays for three nights, he will get the fourth free. The offer is valid until 20 July and subject to availability.

Pyramids Park *Hotel*, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.

Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

Fayed

Helnan Morgan Fayed is offering *special prices* from *20 May* to 31 July. The offer includes LE85 per person in a double room including breakfast, services and taxes.

South Sinai

Cataract Lifana is offering a double room for LE99 per person including breakfast, services and taxes.

Sharm El-Sheikh Inter-Continental Resort and Casino is offering single rooms for LE160 and doubles for LE190. The offer is valid through June and July and subject to availability.

Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double *rooms and LE190 for* single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.

Red Sea

Hotel Sofitel Hurghada is offering double rooms for LE130 per person on a half-board basis. The offer includes 50 per cent discount for children from 12 to 18 years and is available until 31 July.

Hurghada Inter-Continental Resort and Casino is offering single rooms for LE160, doubles for LE190 and villas for LE1,100 including the breakfast buffet, complimentary gifts and discounts. The offer is valid throughout June and July and subject to availability.

Melia Pharaoh Hotel is offering double rooms for LE100 per person on bed and breakfast basis including service charge and taxes. The offer includes 50 per cent discount *for* children from 2 to 11 years. The offer is valid until the end of July and subject to availability.

Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

هكذا من الأصل

Games hit the fast lane

The eighth Pan-Arab Games began with a stunning opening ceremony and continued with a steady stream of medals for Egypt. Inas Mazhar reports from Beirut

The eighth Pan-Arab Games opened in a blaze of colour, with President Elias Harawi presiding over a ceremony which turned the Beirut stadium into the site of a sound and light extravaganza. The president seized upon the occasion to rename the rebuilt sporting arena after its 1957 founder, the late President Camille Chamoun. The 'sports city', one of the most impressive sporting centres in the Middle East, was reduced to rubble by 29 days of air, sea, and artillery bombardment during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Some $75 million, 120,000 cubic metres of concrete and 13,000 tons of iron have been used to rebuild the sprawling compound on 120,000 square metres of space. Its completion in time to host the Pan-Arab Games has been acclaimed by participating nations as a sterling accomplishment in the nation's drive for reconstruction.

The Games shifted into high gear on Sunday when Algeria grabbed the first gold medal of the two-week event by winning the women's half-marathon. Tunisia snatched the second gold in the men's marathon.

Algeria's Dalila Mayyal, 34, a mother of three, ran the 21.100km race in one hour and 26 minutes. Tunisia's Sonia Akoum, aged 30, won the silver and Jordan's 19-year-old Amal Al-Matari was placed third in the seven-woman field.

Tunisia's Al-Taher Mansour, 30, completed the 42.195km distance of the men's marathon in two hours and 28 minutes. Egypt's Suliman El-Fouly, 27, took the silver and Sudan's Ahmed Adam, 29, collected the bronze.

Adam may have had a better result if it hadn't been for an unfortunate mid-race incident. "Adam was leading the field of 11 runners by 300 metres when the referee's car accidentally hit the upper section of his right leg," explained Al-Saddiq Ibrahim, head of the Sudanese mission.

Mansour also won the marathon gold in the 1992 Games in Damascus; his victory in Beirut makes him the first athlete to win a gold in two consecutive Pan-Arab Games.

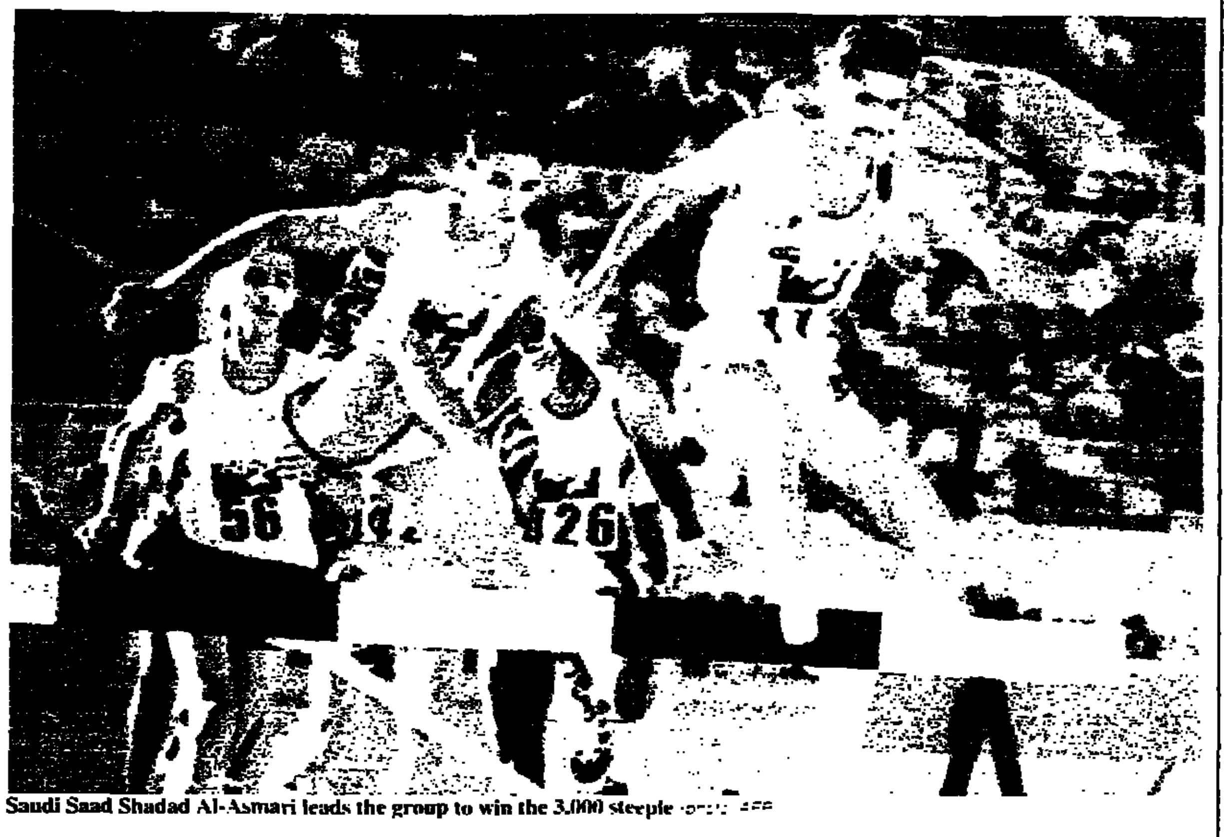
Egypt's Hanan Khaled threw the discus for a distance of 48.51 metres to win that event's silver medal. "I was lucky to win the silver," Khaled commented later. "My record is five metres longer than what I threw today, but I am still recovering from an injury for which I underwent surgery. So I'm very happy with the silver." On Monday, Khaled took a bronze medal in the women's shot-put.

The Egyptian delegation added three more gold medals to its collection on Monday: from Mohamed Fouad in the foil fencing, Sherine Khairy in the heptathlon, rounded off by a gold by Wafaa Baghdady in the shot-put.

Meanwhile, Nashwa Abdel-Hai, who has a two-year-old son, made a comeback to the athletics field to compete in the long jump. It turned out to be a worthwhile effort, and Abdel-Hai came away with the silver medal. Sameh Farid added yet another medal to Egypt's tally with a silver in the pole vault, earned by a 4.80 metre vault. Sameh El-Sayed won the bronze of the discus event.

The Egyptian men's volleyball team have faced difficult competition with teams from Algeria, Qatar and Bahrain. Nevertheless, the team managed to beat Qatar 3-1 (15-8, 7-15, 15-4, 15-8), followed by a victory against Algeria 3-1 (15-5, 8-15, 15-6, 15-8). The women's team have had similar success, winning their first match against Morocco 3-0.

All winners underwent an immediate drugs test, but no violations were immediately reported.



Saudi Saad Shadad Al-Asmari leads the group to win the 3,000 steeple

Olympic salute

SPEAKING at a press conference in Beirut, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Ian Antonio Samaranch stated that he was highly impressed by the city's newly-built Olympic stadium and by the reconstruction of Beirut's sports city, which was devastated during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

"With the new stadium, Lebanon will once again be very strong in sports," said Samaranch, who flew in to attend last Saturday's inauguration of the 1997 Pan-Arab Games in Beirut.

The 77-year-old Spanish Marquis, who has served as IOC president since 1980, also declared that Lebanon is capable of hosting the 2001 Francophone Games in Beirut.

"Organisationally it was first class. I was amazed by the reconstruction of this fantastic sporting centre in such a short time," Samaranch said. "Anyone who has such facilities and such organisational skills should have no trouble hosting Arab, Asian and international competitions."

Asked about Iraq's exclusion from the Pan-Arab Games, the Marquis asserted, "I believe in separating sports from politics."

Lebanon refused to permit the 92-member Iraqi delegation to enter through Syria to participate in the Games. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the other Gulf countries threatened to boycott the Games if the Iraqi delegation participated.

"We were in a critical situation," explained Lebanon's Pan-Arab Games director, Zeid Khaiami. "The success of the Games means a lot to us. If we had allowed Iraq to participate, the people who helped us with money to rebuild our sports facilities would have boycotted the Games. Saudi Arabia contributed $20 million and Kuwait $6 million. We cannot upset them to please Iraq. The Games would have failed, and we want them to succeed."

Rare meeting

THE GENERAL Assembly of the Arab Sports Federation held a rare meeting in Beirut last Monday to elect a new executive board. Twelve members were elected, including Prince Faisal Bin Fahd of Saudi Arabia, Samih Mudallal of Syria, and Mounir Thabet of Egypt.

Prince Faisal Bin Fahd was then elected as president and Sheikh Eissa Bin Rashed of Bahrain as vice-president. During their meeting, the new Arab Sports Federation board decided that Jordan will host the next Pan-Arab Games.

Kuwait was chosen as a substitute in case Jordan does not or cannot organise the Games for any reason. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Fahd, president of the Asian and Kuwaiti Olympic committee, said that Kuwait was keen to host the next Games, but that they withdrew their proposal in order to give the Jordanians the chance to host the Games for the first time.

On the sidelines

- DRUG testing has been introduced to the Arab Games for the first time. All gold medalists will be tested for performance-enhancing drugs.

- PARTICIPANTS in the opening ceremony, including Lebanese soldiers and school children in colourful costumes, used the medium of song and dance to tell the story of Lebanon's past pains and future hopes after the 15 years of civil war which ended in 1990. Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, told the cheering crowd at the Camille Chamoun Stadium: "Today is Lebanon's triumph over war."

- THE 110-metre women's hurdles event, scheduled for early on Sunday, had to be postponed because the hurdles were locked in a room and organisers could not find the keys.

- TWENTY-ONE sporting events were scheduled for the Games, but four had to be cancelled because of the lack of participants. They were: men and women's kick boxing, women's cycling, women's golf and women's yachting.

- HOSTS Lebanon, with 563 athletes, coaches, trainers and administrators has the Games' largest delegation. Djibouti, with one athlete, has the smallest. Lebanese table tennis player, Liza Barikian, 13, is the youngest competitor.

- EGYPTIAN radio is covering the Games by mobile phones because Radio of the East in Lebanon demanded exorbitant fees to open radio links between Egypt and Lebanon.

- IMPORTANT guests sat in bullet-proof VIP stands during the opening ceremony. The special stand comprises 37 seats and is surrounded by bullet-proof glass. It also has a private entrance and exit.

- THE HEAD of the Yemeni delegation has promised a $10,000 bonus to any Yemeni who wins a gold medal.

- THE PRESS Centre in Beirut has asked every journalist to pay $1000 as membership and insurance fees before they can use the centre's facilities to send faxes and reports to their home countries.

- KING Fahd of Saudi Arabia has donated $2.66 million to the Arab Sports Federation, which has overall responsibility for the Arab Games. The federation's president, Saudi Prince Faisal Ibn Fahd, quoted by the official Saudi News Agency, said the gift would enable the federation to pay off its debts and cover its budget for the next two years.

- SHERINE Khairy, Egyptian heptathlon champion, was taken to hospital suffering from exhaustion after she fainted in one of her races.

- EGYPT'S marathon champion, Hassan El-Foli, won Egypt's first silver medal. Businessman Mustafa Habashi has announced that he will sponsor El-Foli in his sports career.

- ZEID Khaiami, manager of the Arab Games, set a new Arab record — away from the sporting arena — when he held a nine-hour long meeting with members of different Games committees. The meeting began at 11am and ended at 8pm.

- THERE were violent protests when troops on duty at the stadium refused entry to 38 Lebanese men. The 38, who claimed they had invitations, began damaging nearby VIP cars in protest. They then fought with troops who attempted to arrest them. The men allege that the troops suggested that those with blue invitation cards go home and those with white invitations jump into the sea.

Davis off to a scorching start

Egypt beat Lithuania 3-0 in the Davis Cup Euro-African Zone Group Two qualifications held in Cairo last week. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab reports

Egyptian and Lithuanian tennis players suffered from the heat as they played crucial Davis Cup matches on an outdoor tennis court at the Gezira Club, in temperatures of over 40 degrees centigrade. According to the rules of the prestigious competition, the 16 countries in the Davis Cup Euro-African Zone Group Two play a maximum of three ties a year in a knockout competition. If they win each tie, they will be promoted to Group One. Losers play each other in crucial play-off matches: the winners of the play-off keep their place in Group Two, the losers are relegated to Group Three the following year. Last May, Egypt lost to Portugal 5-0 and Lithuania lost to Yugoslavia 5-0. Last week's competition at the Gezira Club was to decide which team would stay in Group Two and which would face relegation to Group Three.

A Davis Cup tie consists of four singles and one doubles match, with each match played over five sets. In this tie, Amr Ghoneim, Hisham Hemeida, Gehad El-Deeb and Mohamed Ramadan represented Egypt, while Ralandos Muraska and Eugenjus Cariovas played for Lithuania.

In the first singles match, Ralandos Muraska beat Gihad El-Deeb 4-6, 6-4, 6-2, 6-0, in a match made easy by El-Deeb's poor rallies — a mark of his inexperience. Meanwhile, the 25-year-old Amr Ghoneim, who seemed to enjoy the all-too-rare experience of having the whole country depend on his modest skills, beat his Lithuanian rival Eugenijus Cariovas 3-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, in a match in which he displayed some good rallying and drop shots.

In the doubles event, Amr Ghoneim was paired with Hisham Hemeida, who flew in from the States, delaying his examinations at the University of Georgia, to represent Egypt. His tennis ranking is much better than Ghoneim's, who plays here in Egypt with minimum international ranking. In a tough match, the Egyptian pair finally ousted the Lithuanians 7-6, 7-6, 4-6, 7-6.

"This close score shows that we are very good," commented the Egyptian Tennis Federation's Major General Mohamed Halawa. However, this optimistic outlook ignores the fact that Egypt played this match against a country with no tennis history, and which fluctuates between Group Two and Group Three, unlike Egypt, which have been runners-up in Group Two for the last two years, and aim to be promoted to Group One.

In the final day's singles, the Lithuanians seemed to have become acclimatised to the heat and started to take over. Ralandos Muraska, ranked 650 in the world, beat 559-ranked Ghoneim 6-1, 3-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-3. For three long hours Ghoneim fought hard, but 24-year-old Muraska, who has experience in prize money tournaments in Germany, played tough. "I tried my best to win this match for the sake of my country," said Muraska. "It's more difficult to play for your nation than for yourself. You have to win. It's a great stress."

The decisive final singles match pitched Hemeida, against 17-year-old Cariovas. Hemeida dominated the court for the first two sets, but then his performance began to decline. The player was suffering from stress, both physical and psychological, and he dropped the third and fourth sets. "When I started to lose, I couldn't stop myself from thinking about the defeat. When Cariovas played that stroke which won him the fourth set, I totally collapsed." Hemeida was suffering from a severe cramp, but was soon on his feet. "Because I play for my country, I forced myself to stand up before the three-minute time limit established for cases of cramp," he explained. Then in the last set, after five and a half hours of long rallies and fine shots in a match which had included two tie-breakers, darkness descended.

British referee Jeremy Shales, who, incidentally, umpired the Wimbledon women's final this year, was forced to postpone the match until the following day. Cariovas felt events had worked against him. "I could have finished him off if we had continued playing, because he is someone who starts off very well, but then gets tired very quickly," he commented later.

But the tables were turned the next day when Hemeida finished off Cariovas, the final score standing at 6-2, 7-6, (7/4), 6-7, (5/7), 5-7, 11-9. So, at the end of the day, the Egyptian team were saved from relegation to the lower group. This is good news, but the federation has plans to improve performance next year to allow the national team to be promoted to Group One.

Back from the brink

The national soccer team ended their losing streak with a win against Senegal, increasing their chances of a place in the African Nations Cup finals. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

After a series of upsets, the Egyptian national soccer team have had their first victory in the qualifying rounds of this year's African Nations Cup, raising hopes of an Egyptian presence in the cup finals.

The game, against Senegal last Sunday in Alexandria, was a matter of life or death for Egypt. Out of four qualifying matches, the team had drawn three and lost one, leaving them ranked third in their group with a mere three points. Senegal, on the other hand, were ranked second, with eight points gained from two wins and two draws. Morocco were first.

Egypt played with Hazem Imam in central attack. Magdi El-Sayed and Ahmed Abdallah spearheaded the attack from the left and right wings, backed up by Abdel-Sattar Sabri and Yasser Rayan on the left, and Ahmed Hassan and Hisham Hanafi on the right, with Hadi Khashaba in the centre.

It was a strong game from the start. Egypt's play, marked by attacks from both left and right, was some of the best football seen from the national team for some time. But it takes two sides to play great football, and the Senegalese matched the Egyptians ball for ball with their energy, zeal and enthusiasm. They made two attempts on goal from the right wing, then surprised Egypt's young goalkeeper Essam El-Hadary with sudden attacks from the left. But El-Hadary managed to repel all incursions.

From the first minute of the match until the final whistle, both teams played to win. There was not one moment of relaxation for the players, or boredom for spectators.

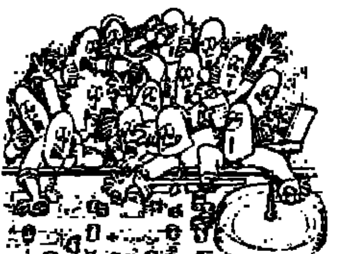
The first goal, scored for Egypt by Hazem Imam, came in the 12th minute. Senegal then intensified their attacks from the left wing forcing Egyptian goalie El-Hadary to move forward, away from the net and into the 60-yard area. It was a dangerous situation for which Egypt could have paid the price. But, mercifully, nothing happened. El-Hadary did not fall for such tactics again and guarded his net closely for the remainder of the match.

There was slight change in the team's formation in the second half of the match, with Ahmed Hassan and Yasser Rayan playing on the right and Hisham Hanafi and Abdel-Sattar Sabri on the left. Some measure of exhaustion was visible at the beginning of the second half, with some slow passes and pauses for thought, but the pace picked up again in the last 20 minutes. The second goal was a nailbiting affair. Hadi Khashaba fluffed a penalty shot, blowing it into the Senegalese goalkeeper's hands. But the goalkeeper couldn't keep hold of the ball, and Khashaba was not going to miss his chance again, taking the ball and shoving it straight into the back of the net to score Egypt's second goal.

Egypt's victory over Senegal earned the national team three points, and greatly increases their chances of qualifying for the African Nations Cup final rounds in Burkina Faso in February 1998. The win also gave a much-needed boost to the team's sagging morale, and, for coach Mahmoud El-Gohary, provided a last-minute chance to prove that he can lead the team to victory. El-Gohary was recruited three months ago to coach the team — on the condition that Egypt scored at least one victory in the African Nations Cup qualifiers.

Despite the string of poor performances, many fans still see El-Gohary as the saviour of Egyptian football, and he also has the support of the Egyptian Football Federation. Determined not to let either down, El-Gohary spent the whole match on his feet, following his team from one end of the field to the other, shouting instructions.

It is interesting to note that, on the Egyptian side, Hossam Hassan was the only professional on the pitch. None of the other seniors who have made up the national team since 1992 were present, not even attacker Ibrahim Hassan, who is suspended from African championships. Instead, Egypt was represented largely by juniors. The young men who made up Sunday's team must have felt a great responsibility on their shoulders. Instead of being unnerved by the gravity of their situation, they managed to translate their nervous energy into positive play and, ultimately, success.



Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

Al-Ahram Weekly 17 - 23 July 1997



Ahmed Okasha:

I asked the doorman which floor the psychiatric clinic was on, and he gave me the kind of smile reserved for those who should be locked up and never let out. Ahmed Okasha would not have been pleased

Brainwaves

For a good three decades, Ahmed Okasha, perhaps Egypt's best-known psychiatrist, has been trying to get the message across: mental illness is not just about madness. While 30 per cent of any given population (including that of Egypt) may suffer from some form of mental illness, only half a percentage point actually need hospitalisation.

At home, he is best known as the president of the Egyptian Association of Psychiatry — a position he has held for the last 15 years — a professor of psychiatry at Ain Shams University, and the president of the French-Egyptian Psychiatric Association.

Abroad, the titles are numerous, including secretary-general of the World Psychiatric Association, chairman of the same organisation's ethics committee, and president of the Arab Federation of Psychiatrists. He has been awarded fellowships by institutions around the globe; 220 papers in national and international journals, and 19 books. bear his name.

But it hasn't come easy for Okasha, although his is one of Egypt's most reputable families: the pasha, his father, was an army general; Tharwat Okasha, former minister of culture and a renowned Egyptian intellectual, is his older brother. Ahmed's choice of a psychiatric career seemed odd, especially considering the fact that, at the time, psychiatrists in Egypt kept a low profile.

But maybe Okasha already had experience in being a bit of a sore thumb. Stuck in the middle, between two older and two younger siblings, was strategically awkward. "If your older brother beats you up, they say don't answer back; if your younger brother beats you up, they say don't hit him, pick on someone your own size. The middle child always feels he has to carve a path out for himself, because in both instances he is a victim — he can't beat up any of his brothers," reflects Okasha in wry tones.

Nonetheless, his attachment to Tharwat is conspicuous: Ahmed continuously breaks off in the middle of the conservation to point out that Tharwat, 14 years his senior, thought up this or that, or that he, Ahmed, only came to understand something through Tharwat's guidance. The influence is unmistakable: "Catharsis through art" was the topic of a lecture organised by Okasha at a gathering of psychiatrists.

As a teenager, when the other boys were spending their summer holidays hanging around and showing off, Okasha had his head buried in a book at home. His friends, their girlfriends and his sisters' girlfriends would pop *in to* consult him on what to do about their love life, family problems and other worries — by then, he had already established a reputation as a brainbox. "This really molded my personality as a listener," he muses.

Of all his family, he was the only one who went into medicine. He had decided that to pursue a military career, marching in his father's footsteps, was anything but a good idea. "I wanted an intellectual life. I was not very much attracted to a very disciplined way of life in which I had to be obsessed by certain rules and duties. It didn't match my personality."

His decision to enter medical school was not welcomed by all, however: "My grandfather was very annoyed; he was a big *omda*, and a very proud person. 'Are you going to go to university so that you can come and ask others for your fees? You'll have to accept envelopes being slipped in your hand. Why can't you become like your father, revered, respected and honoured by people?'" His grandfather's words affected him so deeply that, to this day, Okasha cannot take money directly from patients or even make house calls.

When Okasha graduated among the top five students from the medical school at Ain Shams University, in December 1957, he wanted to specialise in psychiatry. He had missed out on one important piece of information: psychiatry at that time was not on the curricula of medical schools in Egypt. "They told me I could specialise in neurology instead." The university dean, Yehya Sherif, who happened to be his mother's cousin, summoned Okasha to warn him: "'Those who enter this field are the least professional doctors. They are at the bottom of the heap. You have possibilities in surgery, gynaecology, ophthalmology... What are you doing, Ahmed, are you ill?'" Okasha was trotted off to visit professors from different fields, each of whom stressed that there were places available for him in their respective departments.

His training as a house physician in different fields only confirmed his vocation, though. "For instance, when I worked with a surgeon, he told me to prepare three hernias and one appendix. When I worked in the ophthalmology department, the professor would tell me: 'Prepare the operating theatre today for two cataracts and one glaucoma.' They didn't even see the patients' faces sometimes... But I don't see you as an appendix or haemorrhoids or an eye!" Psychiatry, he thought, was deeply connected with the human expression of culture.

In 1959, he was awarded a scholarship to study psychiatry in the United Kingdom. He returned in 1964, his head buzzing with ideas. "I found that people totally confused psychology with psychiatry... they did not realize that psychiatrists had to examine patients like all other doctors."

A fierce battle lay ahead: the fight to eradicate the stigma associated with mental illness. The negative connotations associated with mental illness permeated not only institutional attitudes, but the feelings of the patients themselves. "When I first returned, if I had to treat someone important, we used to meet discreetly. We would not even look each other in the eye. The patient would be so embarrassed that he would not even shake hands with me in public." In many ways, it has almost been his life mission to fight the taboo associated with mental illness. "You feel sympathy and your heart goes out to cancer or heart patients, but you don't feel the same for those who are suffering severely from a mental illness... Yet depression can be more painful than cancer. Fifteen to 20 per cent of depressed patients ultimately commit suicide, but how many cancer or heart patients kill themselves? You cannot imagine the torment that a mental patient goes through."

Not that Okasha belittles other diseases reputed to be more serious than conditions that many feel are "all in the mind"; but at least, he argues passionately, psychiatric illness should be better recognised as a medical problem. "The mentally ill should be treated like all other patients. They are not bad people and they are not possessed." This may seem obvious; but even in today's politically correct climate, the mentally ill are still the subject of mockery or denigration. The world — he will not let you forget it — has a disgraceful record of abusing the rights of those afflicted with mental illness. "They used to think that mental patients were possessed by evil spirits, they used to burn them, to draw and quarter them." He shudders: the scenes seem to pass before his eyes.

Okasha, therefore, is also engaged in a fierce struggle against the de-institutionalisation of mental care: the concept of care in the community touted most emphatically in Britain and the US. "All over the world there has been a movement to close down mental hospitals and offer community care centres instead. After they closed down mental hospitals in Europe and the United States, they realised they had made a big mistake. Mental patients were on the streets, committing petty thefts, with no one to treat them and no place to go. I saw that Egypt was going to take the same measures. They were planning to close down the Abbassiya and Khanka hospitals and release the patients. The alternative offered by the authorities was quite simply a violation of the UN declaration on the rights of mentally ill people, which states that patients must have access to a place for treatment which is not more than one hour away from their homes. The community centre planned was in Badr City — in the middle of the desert, at least two hours away."

Okasha launched a war against policymakers who wanted to shut down the hospitals. He wrote an open letter, published in *Al-Ahram* and other publications, to the minister of health; he lobbied and bullied, protesting that the hospitals were the only facilities available to the chronically mentally ill, and could not be taken away from them. His campaign was a sweeping success; not only were the two hospitals awaiting closure to be upgraded, but new hospitals were to be built as well. "I measure how civilised a country is not by its GNP or its economic performance, but by the care it provides to the weak, who happen to be the elderly, children, and the mentally ill." At any rate, there is a strong empirical correlation between economic performance and the quality of mental health in a country, points out Okasha.

This is why psychiatric care must be incorporated into the training of primary care physicians, he explains, especially when "80 per cent of psychiatric patients who present organic symptoms such as headache, back pain, nausea, sterility, impotence, or menstrual abnormalities are never diagnosed as suffering from a psychiatric disorder."

The situation is not enhanced by the fact that "we lack psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric nurses. Seventy per cent of all specialised psychiatrists go to the Gulf or emigrate," he adds in frustration.

Okasha is no less impatient with the media: they distort the truth, he exclaims, by sensationalising every crime committed by a mentally unbalanced person, vastly exaggerating the proportion of crimes they commit. The media continue to ridicule, humiliate and joke about those suffering from mental disorders. "Why do you joke about mentally ill patients and not heart patients?" he reiterates.

To force people to acknowledge the importance of psychiatric services in practice was another battle — albeit one fought with uncharacteristic tact. The establishment of what is now the Institute of Psychiatry, inaugurated by Mrs Mubarak in 1991, was what Okasha calls the "climax of his career". The centre was initially intended to treat drug addiction. "If I had told them it was a centre for psychiatric disorders, people would have lost interest. So it started off as a centre for the treatment of addiction and psychiatric illnesses, then it gradually changed to psychiatric illnesses and addiction, and finally it became a centre for the treatment of psychiatric illnesses."

The centre was not established easily. The Ministry of *Awqaf* donated the land, and Okasha made his personal contribution, but money was still lacking. He spoke to the late Mustafa Amin, who, four days later, wrote in his column that he had managed to raise half a million pounds for the centre. The contractors were not impressed: this was a drop in the ocean. Okasha turned to Prime Minister El-Ganzouri, then finance minister, and told him about his dilemma. "Don't you have your own private hospital? What do you need the money for?" asked El-Ganzouri. "But people can't afford a place at my hospital," was Okasha's blunt reply. Government assistance came and it was decided that the centre would offer services for a nominal fee to those with modest means, while those who could afford it would pay the going rates. "This centre is now the Mecca of psychiatric treatment for the Middle East," Okasha says proudly.

Although psychiatric facilities, on the whole, remain woefully inadequate in Egypt, Okasha's battles have not been fought in vain. Those who would not have shaken his hand not so long ago now greet him with open arms — literally. Just the other day, one of his former patients hugged him at a party, exclaiming loudly: "Dr Okasha, do you remember me? You treated me 22 years ago!"

Profile by **Mariz Tadros**

Pack of Cards *by Madame Sosostris*





Kamal Sabit



Mohamed Shebl

♠ I keep telling you, dears, that I am a multi-talented, multi-purpose, all-encompassing sort of person. This is why I, unlike others I could mention but shall not, go places. Like last week, when I attended the most enlightening of workshops, organised by Cedare on GIS (Geographical Information Systems, for the uninformed). It is all the latest in environmental management, **Kamal Sabit**, the officer-in-charge of CEDARE, told the attentive audience of delegates from 12 Arab countries. Absolutely essential for those involved in the study of water resources, chimed in **Khaled Abu Zeid**, who is in charge of the CEDARE water management programme. I am doing my bit too, dears. From now on, I shall stop-watch my spells in the shower.

♥ The Society of the Friends of **Mohamed Shebl** (the late movie director and *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s sadly missed movie critic) has just held its first award-giving ceremony. The best film award went to *El-Qubtan* (The Captain), directed by Sayed Said and starring **Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz** and **Ahmed Tewfik**. *Ma' saa El-Tannura* (The Whirling Dervishes), directed by **Mohamed Soliman**, won the prize for the best documentary, while *Waqt Mustaqta'* (Stolen Moments), directed by **Mahmoud Soliman**, won the award for best short feature.

♣ It is hard to believe, but soon I will be given the opportunity to show the world my own interpretation of the Macarena when I join Los Del Mar, the original inventors of this elegant dance, who will be performing at the Gezira Sporting Club and the Nile Hilton's Jackie's Joint. And that is not all, dears, not by far. I will also be able to add my dainty trills to the songs of Grammy Award winner Dr Alban, who will perform at both venues. Just watch out for my improvised interventions in *Hello Africa* and *It's my Life*.

♦ Don't go believing that I need to rest before my great performance. I shall be covering a great deal of territory yet dears, and you will see me soon at the Mubarak Public Library where Abdel-Raouf El-Reedi, chairman of the library, will be opening Samir Zaki's exhibition of oil paintings, water colours and theatre designs. Like yours truly, Samir is a multi-talented artist. He comes all the way from Canada to show us some of the work he has been doing.

